



Caring for young minds

Anna Freud Centre

info sheet



Voice Collective is a London-wide peer support group for young people (aged 12-18) who hear, see or experience things that other people don't. It runs every Thursday at Anna Freud Centre. This sheet should give you a good idea of what the group is about and help you decide whether it might be helpful to you.

- **To join the group:** Email: Natalie.Merrett@annafreud.org, Call: 020 7443 2230
- **For more information:** Email: info@voicecollective.co.uk, Call: 020 7625 9042



VOICES, VISIONS & OTHER UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES

Around 8% of young people hear or see things that other people don't. These kinds of experiences can affect all of your 5 senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell).

Some people find these experiences comforting, especially if they've been through a difficult time, but others feel overwhelmed and scared by them. Whatever your experience is, and however you feel about it, it's good to know that you're not alone in it.

"Without the group I would be isolated. I used to think I was the only person this is happening to, that I was freakish or wrong. It helped me realise that there are other people. It normalised it and made it less inhuman"

- Andy*, Aged 16

There are lots of different ways of understanding voices & visions. Some see them as a reaction to stressful situations or as a creative way that our minds cope with things that worry or stress us out.

Others believe that they're a special gift or ability. Some believe that are spiritual experiences or have a way of understanding them that is based around their culture.

Others think of them as being part of mental ill health or emotional distress. They can also be seen simply as a matter of individual difference. Some people are left handed, some people hear voices.

At Voice Collective, the most important thing is that you're supported to find a way of understanding your experiences that makes sense to you.



COPING, RECOVERY & RESILIENCE

Voices, visions and other sensory experiences affect people in different ways. Some find them inspiring, reassuring or have voices that can make them laugh. Their voices may give them good advice or support.

Others may feel confused and frightened. Many find it harder to concentrate at school, feel isolated and worry that others will think they're 'crazy'.

The good news is that hearing voices or having other unusual experiences doesn't have to stop you from living the life you want to live. There are lots of ways of coping, and living with, these experiences – and many people do.

Recently, Dr Sandra Escher did some groundbreaking research with young people who hear voices. She found that, over a 3 year period, 60% of the young people she spoke to stopped hearing voices altogether.

Most of those who still heard voices felt much more able to cope with them and were getting on with their lives.

The key to recovery seems to be dealing with the real life issues and feelings that are linked to the voices and visions (both as a cause and result of them).

PEER SUPPORT AND SELF HELP

Peer support is based on the idea that, often, the best people to help us through difficult times are those that have been there too. It's about getting together, sharing experiences and finding ways of coping with them.

It's not about there being an expert standing up at the front, telling you what to do. We all have our own expertise and we all have something to offer – even if we don't always realise this.



THE AFC VOICE COLLECTIVE GROUP

Voice Collective groups are peer support groups for young people who hear, see or sense things that other people don't. They are safe spaces for young people (aged 12-18) to meet others who understand what they're going through, without worrying about being judged or made fun of.

The group can help different people in different ways. You might:

- feel less isolated and make friends
- begin to feel 'normal' again
- try out new ways of coping with your experiences
- explore different ways of making sense of them
- share what's going on in your life
- feel like you can be yourself with people you trust

This is not group therapy/treatment and there is no set plan. We're flexible, taking it one week at a time. We offer a choice of activities, led by the needs/interests of group members. This has

included: art, poetry, drama, creative writing, building coping strategies, sharing experiences and - often - simply chatting.

If you decide to join the group, you will have a big part to play in shaping it.

"The group is kinda cool. It's hard to keep it in all the time. It's good to trust people and let it out. It's good to have people who can understand me and know what I'm going through"

- Chloe*, Aged 13

THE PRACTICAL BITS

Anna Freud Centre's Voice Collective group meets every Thursday, 5.15 - 6.15pm.

Members start arriving from 5pm, though, so they have a bit of time to chill out with each other before the group. We always have some snacks/drinks available too (helpful after a long day at school/college).

If you join, there's no pressure to come every week. We're happy to see you whenever you are able to be there.

The group is open to young people no matter where they live, or how they make sense of their experiences.

HOW CAN I JOIN?

If you'd like to come to a group, contact us by phone or email. We'll ask you to fill in a quick self referral form (so we've got some basic contact details and information) and arrange to meet up with you for a chat.

This chat will give you the chance to meet the facilitators, find out more about the group and see how it might help. We'll also be able to see whether there's any other support we can link you up with.

Voice Collective is a Mind in Camden project, made possible by funding from:

- BBC Children in Need
- Comic Relief
- City Bridge Trust

* Quotes contributed by previous group members (names changed to keep it anonymous)