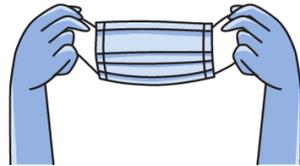




COVID-19 AND VOICE-HEARING?

This past year has brought some of the strangest and most uncertain times many of



us have had to experience. So, it is not unusual that we may have experienced changes in the things we are hearing, seeing or sensing. At Voice Collective we know how challenging it can be trying to navigate these changes and want to highlight that you are not alone in how you may be feeling.

For some of us the voices may have acted as an ally during lockdown, providing companionship and acting as a welcome distraction. For others they may have made the entire lockdown experience that much more difficult. Voices and visions may have been more active than usual, they might have reflected current themes surrounding the pandemic such as fear, isolation and illness, or they may not have been affected at all. Everyone's experiences will be different.

I know that there are various times during lockdown where I felt very overwhelmed. How will I cope with not being able to exercise at the gym or have my usual routine? Will I be able to hide my mental health state from my family or flat mates? How am I going to stay connected to my friends and family if I can't see them?

I've now learned that many other people had similar worries. For that reason, I thought it would be helpful to compile a short list of five coping mechanisms to managing voices and visions at this time.

While reading these coping strategies remember that not everything will work for everyone. Trial and error may help find what works best for you. It is also okay not to be "coping" 100% of the time, we are only human, and we are allowed to have bad days.

1. *Social support*



As well as the physical isolation that lockdown enforced, it is not

uncommon to feel mentally and emotionally isolated. This can be made even more difficult when you are struggling to cope with your voices and visions. It may be helpful to have various contacts who you are able to speak to regularly, people who make you feel comfortable and safe.

These people can be a listening ear when you feel overwhelmed, a sounding board when you're feeling confused, or just a good conversation on a quiet afternoon. They could be a friend, a stranger on a

helpline or a fellow member of a peer support group. Either way connecting with others on a social level may help you feel less isolated.

2. Grounding strategies

Grounding strategies are techniques and objects used to help you feel 'grounded' in the present moment. They can be useful when you feel lost in your thoughts. This may be particularly useful during this time due to the large amount of information and misinformation constantly circulating around Covid-19.

These techniques focus on the senses. For example, you may feel grounded by smelling an essential oil or sucking on a strong flavoured mint. Another technique some people find helpful is writing down grounding statements, e.g., write down 5 things you can hear, 5 things you can see, and 5 you can feel. It is important to really focus on what you're seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or touching when practicing grounding.

3. Creating your own space and routine



Due to Covid-19, many of us have been spending more time in the same environment and around the same people than we would usually. As well as this lack of physical space, we may feel like the voices are taking up a lot of our mental space. This can leave us feeling

confined and anxious. Decorating and making changes to your living space can make it feel new and different, and also give you a creative project to work on.

Establishing a routine can help with disorientation. It's easy to become disoriented when you have been thrown out of your regular routine or are living a completely different lifestyle to one you had envisioned or lived previously. Trying to schedule in regular activities everyday (such as going for a walk, meditating or reading a book) can feel very stabilizing and help get you out of your head.

4. Empowerment

Empowerment is all about changing the power dynamic between you and your voices. Translating the voices is one form of empowerment. Sometimes voices say things that may need some interpretation. For example, a voice saying, 'you're going to infect everyone' might be interpreted as saying 'you're worried about other people', or 'be careful to stay 2m away from others'.

Similarly, you may find it useful to question what the voices are saying. This can be difficult when the voices sound powerful but being sceptical and talking through what the voice said with someone else can help clarify and ease anxiety.

5. Self-care

Be kind to yourself. This is a tough time, and it is important to be patient with yourself. Making sure you do something for yourself every day is a



good way to put yourself first. This may be painting, doing some exercise, watching a movie, or anything else that makes you feel good about yourself. If you find it difficult to do these things on your own enlisting a friend or joining an online group/class might help.

If you would like to read more on coping strategies for voices visit <http://www.voicecollective.co.uk/coping/>

16-25 Virtual Peer Support Group

Voice Collective is also running a weekly virtual 16-25 peer support group. This is a trans-friendly, confidential group that is open to young people between the ages of 16-25 who hear voices or have any other “unusual” sensory experiences. The group runs on Wednesdays from 5:30-6:30 BST.

Online Peer Support Forum

The Voice Collective online peer support forum is also still active. The forum has separate spaces for young people, young adults (18-25), parents & carers, siblings & friends, professionals and group facilitators and is moderated 365 days by the Voice Collective team to keep it safe & confidential. Apply to join the Voice Collective forum at <http://forum.voicecollective.co.uk/>

We are all new to this virtual reality and at Voice Collective we are learning and adapting just as you are. So, if you have any ideas on anything else that may be helpful please let us know by emailing info@voicecollective.co.uk

I hope that if you take away one thing from this article it is that whatever you may be thinking, or feeling is entirely understandable. We are all figuring things out at our own pace and no one person has all the answers which is why supporting each other during this time is more important than ever.

Stay safe and take care of yourselves.

With warmth,

The Voice Collective team at Mind in Camden.



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