

Working with Voices NAMI Presentation 5/16/2017

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A. Hearing Voices : Content and Cause

I. General Introduction

What is Hearing Voices? - What are we talking about?

- Hearing Voices can be called many things: extreme states, schizo-affective, soul crisis, schizophrenia, bi-polar, altered states, dissociation, PTS related, multiple personalities, hallucinations, delusion etc., the term psychosis is frequently used and covers the wide array of Voice Hearing experiences.
- Hearing Voices can involve a condition of the mind that involves a "loss of contact with reality", difficulty with social interaction and the ability to carry out daily life activities.
 - The term *psychosis* is derived from the Greek *psyche*, meaning "soul," "mind," or "breath." and *osis* - indicating metamorphosis or change
- Voices can come from all the senses (mind, touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing)
- They can be experienced in the head, in the body, outside the body or in the environment
- There are different beliefs on where voices come from including biochemical, physical health, special sensitivity, trauma etc.
- People who hear Voices without experiencing fear are less likely to use the mental health system.
 - ❑ 2 out of 3 people who hear voices can function well and are in no need of mental health care (Romme & Escher 2001)
 - ❑ 2-6% of people hear voices (Tien 1991 & Eaton 1991)
 - ❑ 10% of people have had the experience of hearing a comforting or advising voice which was not perceived as being one's own thoughts (Posey & Losch 1983)

Fundamental Voice Hearing Basics: Peer & Trauma Informed Approach

- Only the voice hearer can make meaning and determine direction on healing their voices
- It is SELF-DETERMINED whether or not someone's Voices are problematic
- Voices should be treated as "real" - "Real" Voices can be dealt with as "real" problems.

Benefits of this approach:

- No Stigma
- Hope for Healing
- Validation and self empowerment for the Hearer

Alyssum & The Peer Approach www.Alyssum.org - The Alyssum program model is trauma informed and fully supports integrated and self empowered healing.

Alyssum Statistics:

- Out of a total of 375 Alyssum guests from 2011-2016, 96% cited trauma as the primary cause for admission. Many program guests report more than one type of trauma. 54% report psychosis/spiritual emergence.
- For 77% of repeat guests, reduced acute service was reported due to tools learned while

- at Alyssum and support provided by staff.
- Out of a possible 100%, guests rate their satisfaction with the overall program at 93%,

II. Medication

Studies and evidence show that medication, although needed at times, is not the panacea it is represented to be:

- 30% of people on medications still experience hearing voices (Curson, Barnes & Bamber & Weral 1985)
- Anti-psychotic medication prevents the emotional processing and therefore healing of the meaning of voices (Romme & Escher 2000)
- Evidence from Robert Whitaker's work shows that there are no long or short term studies to document that medications work to heal the Voice Hearer
- The Harm Reduction approach to coming off medications has been shown to be helpful. A link to Will Hall's Harm Reduction guide is provided in the resources.
- **Stigma and Hopelessness** can be avoided by changing the worldview from "what's wrong with you" to "what happened to you". This approach is foundational in peer support.

III. Trauma

Studies show that Voice Hearing (psychosis) is linked to trauma:

- Chemical alterations in the brain can be caused by long-term stress resulting from trauma.
- When a person is impacted by trauma the mind has the ability to compartmentalize and store the trauma to be processed at a later time.
- The energetic impact (emotional, mental and physical) of trauma can be stored within the body's energy fields. Energy healers and spiritual people can see this and can help to shift it.
- Ongoing suppression, denial or dismissal of trauma can result in the energy of those events gaining mass to such a degree that it becomes overwhelming to the everyday mind and can emerge as Voices or shifts in context or reality.

Trauma and psychosis statistics - see resources for more informational links

- In 77% of people diagnosed with schizophrenia, their Hearing Voices was related to traumatic experiences (Romme & Escher 2006)
- 80% of Voice Hearers are diagnosed with dissociative disorders (disruptions or breakdowns of memory, awareness, identity, or perception with dissociation used as a defense mechanism) which are thought to primarily be caused by psychological trauma. (Honig et al., 1998)
- In 70% of Voice Hearing patients and 50% of non-patient Voice Hearers, the onset of voice hearing was clearly connected to threatening or traumatizing daily life experiences (Romme 1989)
- **The Felton Institute:** Trauma & psychosis current data, statistics, practice and outcomes (link provided in resources)
 - People who have been sexually assaulted as children are 3.5 times more

- likely to hear voices than those who have not (Shevlin et al., 2011).
- Patients attending early psychosis clinics report high rates of childhood trauma: 54% report emotional abuse, 23% report physical abuse, 28% report sexual abuse, 46% report emotional neglect and 42% report physical neglect. Women are significantly more likely to experience emotional and sexual abuse (Duhig et al., 2015).
 - The attributable increased risk for psychosis from childhood adversity is 33% (Varese et al., 2015).

IV. Healing the Brain

One school of thinking is that the brain is an organ which processes mind and all mental factors. Changing how thoughts are directed (mind management) and how life is engaged in can support rewiring the neural pathways in the brain, reshaping and healing the brain itself (see NICAMB website listed in resources)

Rewiring and healing the brain can be supported by:

- Love, Community, Environment, Human Connection
- Self determination
- Music, art and nature (avoid negative/jarring music)
- Acceptance and non-judgment
- Setting positive and directional intentions
- Releasing energetic blocks in the body's energy system
- Meditation, mind management
- Sleep and rest
- Omega or fish oil supplements

Benefits of meditation:

- *Neuroscientist Richard Davidson's 2004 study on the energy emitted by Tibetan meditating monks is chronicled by Stanford University.*
- Davidson used EEGs to test the Dalai Lama's most advanced monks each with 15-40 years of meditation practice. A control group of students with no previous meditation experience was also tested after a week of training

Findings:

- *Davidson found some of the monks produced gamma wave ("some of the highest-frequency and most important electrical brain waves.") activity more powerful and of higher amplitude than any documented case in history. The movement of the waves was also far better organized than the non-meditating test volunteers.*
- *It was also shown that meditation could result in the redistribution of gray matter in the brain and prevent its loss. The loss of gray matter has an impact on many mental functions, such as the control of emotions, impulses, thoughts, and movements. This is because the caudate nucleus, which controls these functions and more, is situated within the gray matter.*

B. Healing Voices

- **Gloria's Story - Intro of Two Kinds of Voices**
 - Voice Hearers may be separated into two kinds of Voice Hearing; the first, occurring as the result of trauma; the second as a result of spiritual awakening, where trauma may prevent Voice Hearers from successfully re-grounding after a spiritual awakening or emergence
- Two classes can overlap and be experienced by a person at once (not fun)

I. Defining and Recognizing Voices which result from trauma

While only the Hearer can determine where the Voices come from, in this section we will look at Trauma and its impact. Trauma based Voices are the result of the mind protecting a person by compartmentalizing and storing the memory of difficult events to be dealt with at a later date. When the trauma is ready to be processed by a person's conscious mind, the emotions, knowledge or memories may erupt as "Voices". Various dissociative states, post traumatic stress, Voice Hearing, flashbacks or multiple personalities may be experienced.

Recognizing Trauma Voices

- The overall feeling of these Voices (determined by the Hearer) is that "they are part of me or my life". They do not feel foreign or "other" to the Hearer.
- Voices may appear to represent aspects of the Hearer themselves or of family members or others who have had significant relationships with the Hearer.
- Voices may be positive, leading, re-assuring and guiding and/or aggressive and negative.
- Voices vary in age, gender, loudness, form and can be experienced through different senses

II. Defining and Recognizing Spiritual Awakening Voices

Voices which result from spiritual awakening (emergence/emergency or soul crises) have been described by some Voice Hearers as an energetic shift or opening in consciousness. These Voices may be more about the hearer's experience of reality, rather than the specific content/message of the Voices they are hearing. Once the Voice Hearer experiences this Awakening, they may have trouble re-grounding because they fear it will prevent them from "being or knowing" their true self. As we live in a culture which does not recognize, support or understand spiritual transition, the world becomes unsafe for someone experiencing this.

Possible benefits of a Spiritual Awakening:

- simplify or eliminate the build-up of personal experiences and karmas
- eliminate or diminish the strong ego identity of self
- creating an understanding that objects in reality are not concrete or independently existing - but are fluid in nature
- eliminate fear and other negative emotions
- clarify the nature of death

Trauma experiences may prevent or hinder a Spiritual Awakening due to personally unresolved ego issues and fear based reactions to the experience. In addition, past trauma may have caused changes in the brain which hinder its ability to adapt rapidly enough to the influx of higher energy and rapidly shifting worldviews. Spiritual transition, even when pursued

intentionally, has been known to disorient people to such an extent as to cause permanent delusion and death.

Recognizing Spiritual Awakening Voices

- The onset may be abrupt and clearly noticed
- Voices may be accompanied by strong surges in energy, which rise and fall in cycles.
- The hearer may experience a more expansive consciousness or a reality which is not earth bound (conventional reality), which could include: other beings, other planets, the true nature of reality, God etc.
- The Voices experienced under these circumstances may be determined by the hearer to be “other” - as in from other dimensions of reality (angels, demons, extraterrestrials, etc).
- The expanding awareness, which the Hearer is unprepared for and uneducated about, does not correlate with the Hearer's established worldview and as such may incite euphoria, great fear and/or paranoia.
- This altered state of consciousness may cause a total lack of interest in, or engagement with daily life (not caring about getting food, paying bills, work, sleep, etc.)
- This experience may be accompanied by the perceived ability to hear the thoughts of other people and to see auras, etc. (shamanism, new age healing, desire to follow a spiritual path etc may come into play)
- The inability to stay connected and grounded may become a serious issue.

Some common responses by the Hearer to Spiritual Awakening Voices include:

Mystic responses

- Being here to save the world
- Being God/Jesus or some other recognizable spiritual figure.
- Being a warrior in the "Final Battle"
- Having special powers; seeing auras, having extra sensory perception, being psychic, being able to teleport, change form, fly and travel to other planets.
- Seeing and talking to Angels and other ET beings
- Remembering “who I am” and “my purpose for being”.
- Strong desire to go “home”, not wanting to be “here”.

Fear responses

- Being spied upon or pursued by: FBI, CIA, Government, Nazis, Aliens
- Seeing aliens, space ships, feeling as if they are going to take me away.
- Seeing demons and being possessed by negative consciousness.
- It is the end of the world, nothing matters.
- Electronic bugs, microchip implants, fear of technology.
- Extreme paranoia and gradual withdrawal from a perceived unsafe world.

People who do not have any interest in, or motivation to, re-ground or “come back” may have experienced the following:

- Trauma
- Struggle to make their life work for them
- Difficulty with a firm sense of self (good boundaries, self-esteem, confidence, coping skills, etc.)
- Detachment from family, friends and community

III. Working with Voices

A. Identifying Voices (worksheet #1)

The Hearer begins the courageous process of facing their Voices, speaking about them and deleting the secrecy. Many of the following identifiers may change over time and it may help to date all the worksheets, start new ones as needed, and keep them to review as the healing process unfolds. The following steps may help the Hearer to Identify their Voices:

- Hearer ascribes identifiers to the Voice - description, name , age, gender etc.
- Hearer identifies whether the Voices are personally related to their life experiences or “Other” and not personally related
- Hearer identifies the primary emotions expressed by the Voice
- Hearer identifies if the Voice is helpful or not
- Hearer describes how the Voice makes them feel
- Hearer identifies which senses are impacted

B. Making Meaning of Voices (worksheet #2)

The Hearer begins to undertake an understanding of the purpose of the Voices and how they may relate to their personal life experiences (or not). Worksheets should be dated and kept and new worksheets added as over time information and relationships between and with the Voices may change. The following steps may help the Hearer to make meaning of their Voices:

- Hearer identifies which Voices they may want to be in contact with and which ones they do not.
- Hearer begins to understand or de-code the message the Voice is giving them
- Hearer identifies who (including other Voices) the Voice has a relationship with
- Hearer makes meaning of the “job” or purpose of the Voice
- Hearer identifies any familiar people in their lives whom the Voice may represent.

Some additional tools people have found to be helpful for Spiritual Awakening Voices:

- Access spiritual education
- Examine the role trust and faith have for you (do you believe in a God or a higher power and what does that relationship look like...can it be helpful to you)
- It's OK to not story things you do not understand

C. Managing Relationships with Voices (Worksheet #3)

Managing the relationship with Voices is about the Hearer making decisions, setting boundaries and facilitating working relationships with their Voices. Working patiently and intuitively (not overdoing) and maintaining some normal daily life balance is important. Setting intentions and using positive visioning for guidance may help. For Hearer's who have decided not to have contact with their Voices, management will be about achieving firm boundaries rather than about creating relationships. The following steps may help the Hearer to manage relationships with their Voices:

- Hearer establishes how they would like their relationship with the Voices to be.
- Hearer describes how the Voice would like the relationship to be, understanding that the relationship is based on a two way dialogue to determine everyone's needs.
- Hearer identifies and describes when the Voices become active or are triggered
- Hearer learns which Voice is dominant or primary, and how the other voices relate in hierarchy (pecking order).
- Hearer establishes a "meeting schedule" with the Voices for work or quality time
- Hearer begins to establish clarity about their "rights" and boundaries, just as one would do with another person. These can be time/schedule boundaries, as well as physical or emotional boundaries.
- Hearer ensures that all Voices are heard in a safe and supported manner
- Hearer asks questions of the Voices and gets to know them
- Hearer engages in a process of "group therapy" within and begins to assume the role of "parent" or primary person to all the Voices.
- Hearer may begin to develop an "inner family" who they rely on for companionship
- Hearer may allow a Voice to talk through them to a trusted support person if so desired. In this way, the supporter may be able to engage in dialogue with the Voice as well. (This may be experienced as a vulnerable time by the Hearer.)
- As the Hearer becomes stronger, the Voices may lessen.
- Voices may begin to impart "good" advice and wisdom.
- Some (or all) Voices may begin to integrate as a part of the managing process.
- Hearers begin to learn to live in balance with their voices

For Voices which the hearer wants no contact with, and has identified as being not a part of themselves (non-human or "other") some of the following may be helpful:

- Dialoguing with, bartering with or embracing fear based Voices may lead to further disruption and fear
- Saying a strong "NO" to the presence of anything which attempts to enter your space
- Learning "mind tools" or visualizations such as: building shields and creating blocks.
- Calling in protection or help however you believe this is available (angels)
- Being aware that thinking about Beings or Voices invites them in

MANAGEMENT TOOLS:

Some healing tools others have found helpful:

- Set aside physical space where the work is done....for instance a corner of your room or a couch....make your inner work location specific (setting a physical boundary).
- Supporting the brain to heal, change and adapt.(see above list)
- Engage in "Mitzvah" therapy, the act of helping others will be beneficial and grounding
- Accept the things you can't explain and let go of them
- Learn to trust inner wisdom and "knowing"
- Positive mantras (statements or affirmations) which can be repeated
- Use distraction techniques (puzzles, a movie, knitting, music, etc)
- Support groups with other Voice Hearers are often very helpful.
- Not isolating
- Make art about the meaning or feelings of the Voices
- Integrate spiritual practice or knowledge in your life
- Mind management - developing processes of mindfulness, concentration and surrender
 - Mindfulness; developing a part of your mind which can watch and analyse

thoughts and actions while simultaneously determining which thoughts are helpful -observing yourself

- Concentration; - developing the ability to focus on an intention, a thought, or an object in order to hold the mind on a particular path - this can be done through meditative practice or through engaging in specific activities.
- Surrender - "letting go and letting God", the process of conquering fear through having faith.

VI. Integrating, Letting Go, or Living with Voices (worksheet #4)

The Hearer makes the choice whether to integrate, let go, or live with their Voices. Integrating and Letting Go of Voices may happen naturally as a result of resolving past experiences and the work the Voice Hearer is undertaking. The compartmentalization of the different Voices breaks down, some Voices may merge with other Voices and the Hearer may develop a more unified sense of self. Hearers who decide to live with their Voices may develop daily routines which work for everyone (both the Hearer and the Voices). The following steps may help the Hearer to integrate, let go of, or live with their Voices:

- Hearer decides which direction they want to take (whether to integrate, live with, or let go of their Voices)
- Hearer determines how the Voices may be helpful to their life and why they may want to live with their Voices.
- Hearer sets an intention or a plan for achieving their chosen relationship with their Voices.
- Hearer identifies the feelings they may need to process and work through as a result of the choice they have made
 - Grief and loss may be experienced as the hearer lets go of the story, the relationship and the experience and prepares to move forward without the Voice(s)
- The hearer builds an increased relationship with everyday life (work, friends, social activities)
- Acceptance of whatever choices are made is helpful in supporting self-empowerment and may lead to acquired wisdom and the beginnings of a whole new worldview.

Daily Maintenance Tools which others have found helpful for living with Voices:

- Dead cell phones or blue-tooth ear pieces which allow the hearer to talk with their Voices in public without attracting attention.
- Cleaning energy space (meditation and other wellness practices and routines)
- Going out in nature
- De-cluttering electronics or other things which do not contribute to well being
- Clear boundaries which support the Hearer to maintain full dominion over their own space.
- Eating well
- Social and community support
- Engaging in activities with the Voice....doing things the Voice likes to do (going out for their favorite flavor of ice cream)

V. Team Support

Team members are an integral part of the support and healing process for anyone experiencing Voices. Supporting Voice Hearers requires patience, self awareness, education, good boundaries, perseverance, commitment and excellent self care tools. It is important for team members to not forget themselves in the process of caring for another. Hazards associated with supporting a Voice Hearer can include: burn-out, vicarious trauma, the breakup of families, financial distress and more. Some things others have found to be helpful for themselves and for the Voice Hearer included:

- Educate themselves, others and the Hearer about Voices so as to reduce fear and improve the healing opportunities
- Acceptance of the existence of a spiritual process and energetic and non-human realities - even if you don't understand this.
- Have an understanding of trauma and the mind's ability to fragment, suppress and compartmentalize traumatic incidences
- Understanding that post traumatic stress, multiple personalities, repressed memories and dissociation can be related to hearing voices
- Understanding that trauma and its impact is self defined, and what may be traumatic to one person may not be to another
- Support the Hearer to not feel "crazy" or broken - especially if new memories or a spiritual awakening occurs
- Practice non-judgement
- Support the Hearer to see the transformational possibilities in Hearing Voices.
- Avoid creating stigma by understanding that there is nothing wrong with the Hearer
- Sit with discomfort as the Hearer self directs the healing process.
- Financial planning
- Understanding of the health care system and options
- Build a support team - don't do it all on your own
- Connect with other team members and find support for the supporter!
- Maintain connection and provide support while holding clear personal boundaries
- Practice self care and wellness - very important!

VI. Conclusion

- Hearing Voices includes a broad array of experiences.
- Only the Hearer can make meaning of their Voices and determine their healing process
- Medication can be helpful but has limitations.
- Some people manage their daily life while Hearing Voices
- Evidence shows that trauma is a significant cause for Hearing Voices.
- Trauma may also cause challenges in re-grounding after spiritual emergence
- Through processing trauma and listening to the Voices healing can happen.
- Healing the Brain through rewiring neural pathways is possible.
- Gloria's personal experience leading to different types of Voices: Trauma Voices and Spiritual Awakening voices
- Healing Work: Understanding and identifying voices, learning more about what unmet needs they may represent, using intention, visioning and establishing boundaries to manage them, learning to balance and integrate the voices into your life in a balanced way.

- Support teams with this understanding of Hearing Voices are essential in helping a Voice Hearer to process their trauma and heal

VII. Resources

Medication

Robert Whitaker: Data and statistics on medication, outcomes examined - books and research
<http://www.robertwhitaker.org/robertwhitaker.org/Home.html>

British Journal of Psychiatry: Short finding on the effectiveness of medication
<http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/209/5/361>

Peter R. Breggin, MD,; medication and coming off.
 Psychiatric Drug Withdrawal: a Guide for Prescribers, Therapists, Patients and Their Families (2013).
<https://breggin.com/>

Will Hall's Harm Reduction guide can be found here:
<http://www.willhall.net/files/ComingOffPsychDrugsHarmReductGuide2Edonline.pdf>

Trauma

Professor John Read: Lancashire Early Intervention Service: Trauma, Psychosis and statistics
<https://www.lancashirecare.nhs.uk/media/Site%20Images/EIS/Shared-Learning-Conference/John%20Read%20Presentation%20-%20IAPT%20Conference%20June%202013.pdf>

The Felton Institute: Trauma & psychosis current data, statistics, practice and outcomes
<http://felton.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Trauma-Early-Psychosis.pdf>

<http://felton.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Voices-Visions-Alternative-Realities-Groups-for-Young-People-UPDATED.pdf>
[ween](#)

The Adverse childhood experiences study: a springboard to hope
www.acestudy.org/

The Mind, the Brain & Meditation

Meditation and mind frequencies: Different frequencies of mind, and the power of mind to change and heal
<http://mb.ntd.tv/inspired/stories-of-conviction/superhuman-energy-cultivated-meditators-science.html>

Rebecca Gladding M.D.: Use Your Mind to Change Your Brain
 The science explaining why you should meditate every day
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/use-your-mind-change-your-brain/201305/is-your-brain-meditation>

Harvard neuroscientist Sara Lazar: Meditation not only reduces stress, it changes your brain. Washington post article and video: more videos online
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2015/05/26/harvard-neuroscientist-meditation-not-only-reduces-stress-it-literally-changes-your-brain/?utm_term=.2ef9c8ceb55a

The Mind and its Functions: Buddhist spiritual book on the mind
Geshe Rabten
Edition Rabten 2005

NICAMB: National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine : meditative neuroscience
<http://www.nicabm.com>

Hearing Voices Organizations & Resources

Mad in America: peer resources
<https://www.madinamerica.com/>

The International Hearing Voices Network: Intervoice
<http://www.intervoiceonline.org/about-voices/essential-facts>

The Maastricht Approach
Accepting and working with voices: The Maastricht approach
Dirk Corstens, Sandra Escher and Marius Romme
Moskowitz (ed) (2008) Psychosis, trauma and dissociation: Emerging perspectives on severe psychopathology, Wiley & Sons. Pp 319-332.
<http://www.dirkcorstens.com/maastrichtapproach/>

The Hearing Voices Network
<https://www.hearing-voices.org/voices-visions/>
This group also sponsors and runs hearing voices groups

Sean Blackwell Presenter/educator Hearing Voices
<http://www.bipolarawakenings.com/>

Rufus May Presenter/educator Hearing Voices
www.rufusmay.com/

Jacqui Dillon Presenter/educator Hearing Voices
<http://www.jacquidillon.org/>

Ron Coleman and Karen Taylor: Presenters/educators Hearing Voices
<http://www.workingtorecovery.co.uk/>

The Felton Institute: Research, data and outcomes
<http://felton.org/>

Vermont Hearing Voices - Groups

USA Phone support
The HVN-USA Facilitator teleconference: the First Friday of every month at 3PM EST. To access dial

1-774-220-4000 and enter conference ID# 46077.

Howard Center: Burlington VT for HC clients only

<http://www.howardcenter.org/home>

208 Flynn Avenue, Burlington, VT 0540

802.488.6000

Counseling Services Addison County for CSAC clients only

<http://www.csac-vt.org/>

89 Main St., Middlebury, VT 0575

(802) 388-6751

Pathways Community Center

279 North Winooski Avenue Burlington

(888) 492-8218

<http://www.pathwaysvermont.org>

Hearing Voices group on Tuesdays from 2-3pm

Health Care and Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) for HCRS clients..may be open to others

51 Fairview St, Brattleboro, VT 05301

(802) 254-6028

<http://www.hcrs.org/>