

**I**t can be hard to know how to start a conversation and feel comfortable talking about hearing voices with family, friends, and other people in your life. Here are some ideas and suggestions around how to plan for a conversation about voices which might help to make talking about your experiences easier.

## 1 Why do you want to tell someone?

A good place to start can be asking yourself – why am I thinking of telling someone? Do you want understanding and emotional support, a sounding board to help you figure things out, access to mental health services, or changes at university or in the office to help you work more effectively? Being able to answer these questions can shape what type of conversation you have and with whom.

Understanding what you need - whether it's a listening ear, a cuddle, practical help at home or adjustments to your environment at work – could help someone better assist you.

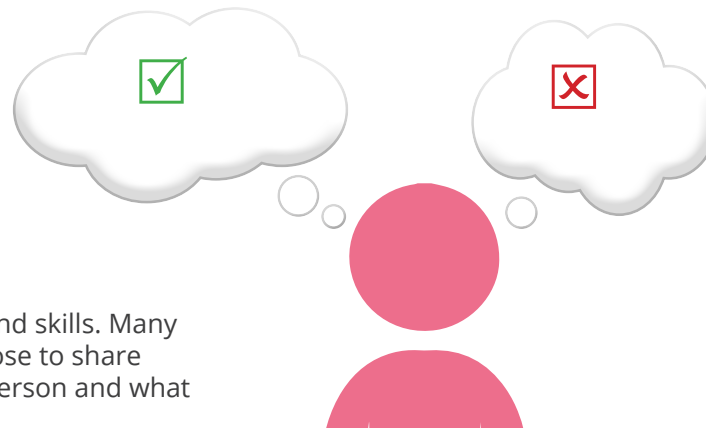
## 2 Who can you tell?

Once you know why you want to talk about your voices, think of who you could talk with to achieve your aim. Depending on what your needs are, this could be a close family member, partner or friend; an employer, teacher or tutor; or a GP or mental health professional.

Consider each possible person and think about what might make them a good (or not so good) person to talk with.

- Are they **trustworthy**?
- Have they been **supportive** in the past?
- Have you seen them support others?
- Are they **empathetic** and a **good listener**?
- Do you find them **easy to talk with**?
- Are they good at finding practical solutions?

Different people in your network will have different strengths and skills. Many voice-hearers vary the level of disclosure – how much they choose to share and what they say – depending on their relationship with the person and what they need.



"If you feel judged, don't keep talking to that person. Choose safe people – open minded, kind people."

"I have found it helpful to talk to my parents, but most helpful was attending a hearing voices group. Going to the group being able to say something which was normal to me as a voice-hearer, and the other group members will also see it as normal. If I told friends there would be shocked responses."

"Talking with others who also experience voices has been immensely helpful. It's reinforced the idea that I'm not alone and that I am not crazy!"

If you feel there is no one you can talk to or you're interested in peer support, you might try:

### The Samaritans

A listening service that offers 24/7 support:  
**116 123**

### Hearing Voices Groups

These enable people who hear voices to connect with others who have similar experiences:

<https://understandingvoices.com/working-with-voices/peer-support/hearing-voices-groups/>

### Voice Collective

A London-based charity that has an online forum for young people up to the age of 25:

<http://www.voicecollective.co.uk/>

### 3 What do you want to say?

Deciding what to say is the next step. It might help to ring-fence any 'no-go' areas in advance.

**Remember:** you get to choose what you say and don't say about your experiences, even when the conversation has already started. You can say 'no', 'I'd rather not talk about that right now', 'can we come back to that?' or 'this is getting a bit intense for me, let's talk about something else'. It's OK to change the subject, postpone or end the conversation if you start to feel anxious or uncomfortable.

#### How do I decide what's OK to share?

Here's one idea that might be useful.

1. Imagine the person you're going to speak with is completely understanding, that you're completely comfortable with them and there is no risk of stigma or discrimination, and the voices are OK with you speaking about them. In this 'ideal world' what would you like to say? You may wish to write this down to keep a record of it.
2. Have a look at what you've written and cross out the bits that you definitely do not want to share with this person at the moment. Some people find that they have a strong reaction here.
3. Are there any parts that feel definitely or mostly OK to talk about? These can be a good starting point.
4. Have a look at what's left. How do you feel about these bits? What is it about them that feels difficult to share? Is there anything that is essential to help you get your point across, or can you leave it till later?

Some people choose to do the same process, thinking about their voices. Having an idea of how your voices might react could influence what you want to say or what you put in your backup plan

### 4 Finding the words

Many people find that the risk of a negative reaction from others is reduced if they talk in a normalising way about their voices – being careful about their choice of language and using facts, figures and examples to illustrate just how common hearing voices really is, or how the association with mental illness doesn't reflect every voice-hearer's experience.

"Using phrases like 'hearing voices' is much easier for me and other people to engage in. Not medicalised words like 'psychosis'."

"I always emphasise that there are loads of people out there that have these experiences. It's just not talked about in everyday life."

"I talk about it as a spectrum of experience – everyone has some experience on this spectrum, but not all are equally loud or developed."

### 5 Having a back-up plan

Even if the conversation goes well, talking about voices can feel like a big thing – especially if you're speaking out for the first time or are telling someone who is important to you. If you can, set aside some time to do something that usually helps when you're stressed out. Having a back-up plan of what you can do if things don't go well can be a lifeline.

