

# Ten Tips for Parents of Children Who Hear Voices

Drs. Sarah Parry and Filippo Varese

## **The Young Voices Study - Advice for parents from parents**

Over recent months, we have been hearing from young people who hear voices and their parents/guardians. As we discussed in a recent [article](#) hearing voices is by no means unusual during childhood and an experience that some young people find helpful and comforting in times of stress and difficulty.

As well as talking to young people, we have heard from parents from the UK, Norway and Australia about their experiences of supporting their children, seeking help from health services and how they have come to make sense of the voices their children hear. Although our study is still in the early stages, the responses we have had from our online parent survey have been incredibly helpful and full of useful recommendations and insights. Further information about our study can be found through [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and on our online surveys for [parents](#) and [young people who hear voices](#) .

## Ten Top Tips from Parents:

1. **“Don't panic. Hearing voices isn't a sign of ‘madness’”**- Although words like "madness" and "schizophrenia" can quickly come to people's minds, hearing voices is not uncommon during childhood and can actually be a very helpful way for young people to manage times of distress.
2. **“Seek advice sooner rather than later”** – Help comes in many forms and it is important that things don't get to a point where young people and parents feel overwhelmed. There are several online communities and sources of direct support that help normalize these experiences and offer reassurance. <http://www.voicecollective.co.uk/support/parents-carers/>
3. **“Show them constant love and support”** – The findings of our research and that of colleagues in the field suggests that openness, curiosity and acceptance can be very helpful responses for young people. However, if a young voice hearer is met with disbelief or panic, they can feel increasingly distressed and are more likely to experience further difficulties.
4. **“Take a day at a time.”** – Experiences of hearing voices during childhood is rarely a sign of long-term mental health difficulties. Calmness and patience seem to be helpful platforms from which a young person can build upon to find other helpful coping strategies and manage difficulties over time. <http://www.intervoiceonline.org/3393/news/free-booklets-for-parents.html>
5. **“Keep calm and research it a little bit yourself.”** – We have had several responses and emails over recent weeks from parents and young people expressing their relief and gratitude that a more compassionate perspective is being taken towards voice hearing. There are many helpful sources of support for young people and families that do not prescribe to the traditional and outdated preconceptions around voice hearing. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRqI4lxuXAw>
6. **“Try and get health professionals to talk to you.”** – Some parents have reported that healthcare professionals seemed reluctant or uncomfortable talking about voice hearing. Similarly, our colleagues have also been told

by mental health practitioners that they do not feel as though they have sufficient training in relation to these experiences. As such, parents may need to seek out professionals who do have relevant expertise, including experts-by-experience, and make use of helpful advice online through organizations such as the Voice Collective and Hearing Voices Network. <https://www.hearing-voices.org/>

7. **“Only be concerned when it is impacting on their sense of wellbeing.”** – A few of the parents who have responded to our online survey discussed how their older children have heard voices for some time. Generally, the voices seem to have become a manageable part of day-to-day life and often a source of comfort and support for the young person. A couple of parents explained how the voices their child hears are an essential part of how they maintain their positive wellbeing.
8. **“We can all be a little 'mad' at times, but as long as we understand ourselves and have a range of positive coping strategies, then we do not need to see that difference as negative.”** – A key message that has come through time and again is that difference is not a bad thing, and neither are the voices. Many of the parents who have been in touch explain that they were nervous at first, not knowing how to talk about their children’s experiences, although have come to see then beneficial impact of the voices as a way to cope with challenges. <https://theconversation.com/parents-dont-panic-if-your-child-hears-voices-its-actually-quite-common-78964>
9. **“Listen, encourage ongoing dialogue and support them to normalize the voices”** – All of the parents who have kindly offered insights into their experiences have highlighted how essential it is to keep channels of communication open, to keep a curious and open mind, and to hear what the young person needs. This has been seconded by the young people who have also taken part in our study so far. However, there also seems to be a fine line between ‘normalizing’ and ‘minimizing’ – recognizing the impact of the voices for the young person is also crucial.

10. **“Remain calm and reassuring but seek advice and support.”** – The parents and young people who have shared their experiences have given many examples of trying to find the right support for their particular family circumstances. Parents have explained how isolating it can feel to support a young person who hears voices, until helpful support that meets their needs is found. When parents feel supported, they can increasingly meet the needs of their child, which is why it is so important we involve parents and families in work such as this.

# About the Author

These tips are brought to you by the researchers and clinical psychologists Drs. Sarah Parry and Filippo Varese. Filippo Varese has published extensively on voice hearing over the last ten years and is involved in a number of related research projects. Sarah Parry works with looked-after children who have experienced early years' traumas and broadly researches the influences of childhood trauma.