

# HEARING VOICES NETWORK USA



*Voices, Visions & Other Unusual or Extreme Experiences*

## **An Overview of the Hearing Voices Approach**



Western Mass RLC has supported the development of:



Which has grown out of the international hearing voices movement...





# Hearing Voices Network

for people who hear voices, see visions or have other unusual perceptions

Seeing

Smell

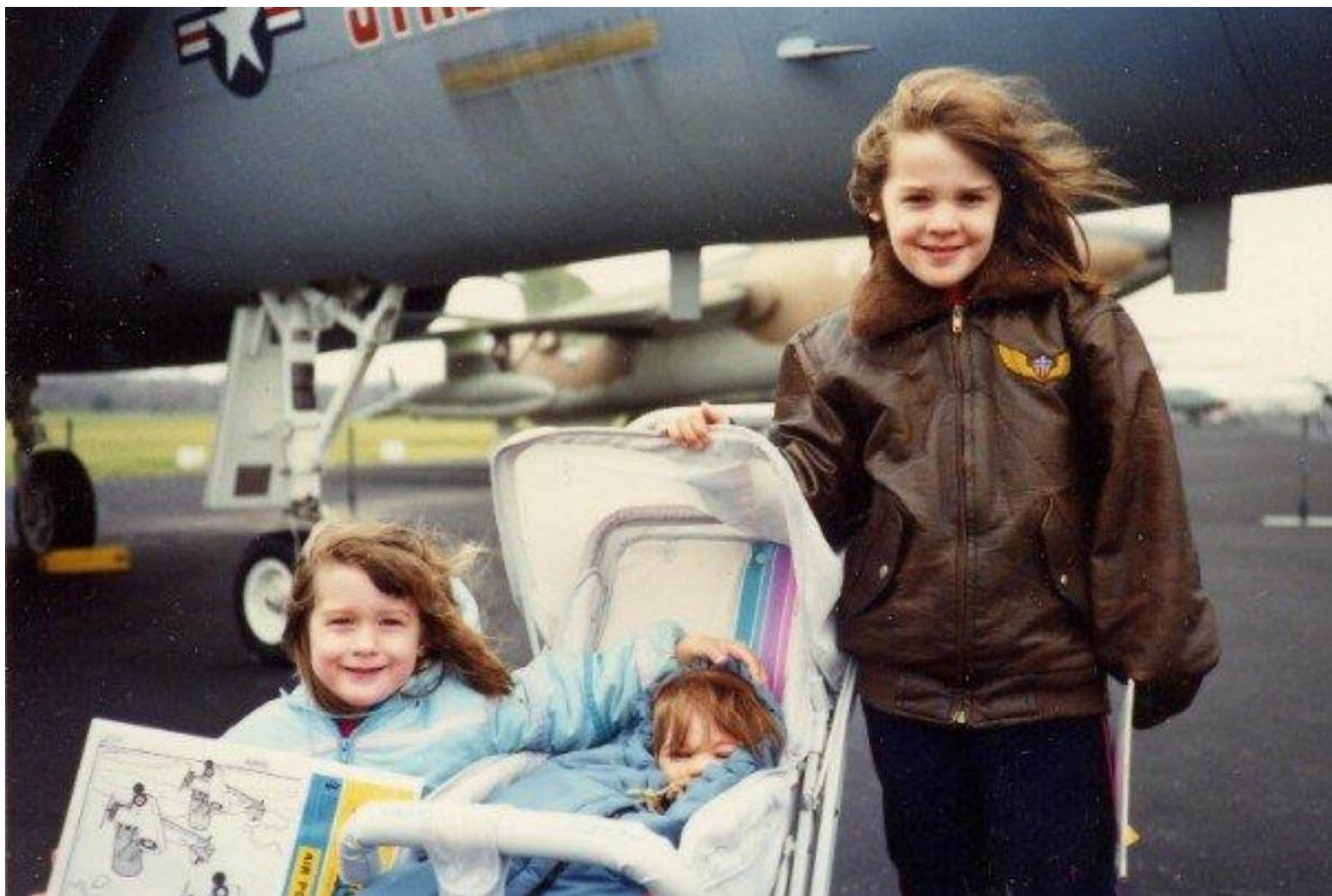
Touch

Taste

Hearing

Etc...





# CAROLINE'S STORY



מזל טוב!



MRCWHEELY.COM

DCRD vs. BRRG

# The History of The Hearing Voices Network begins in The Netherlands

Marius Romme and Patsy Hage question the limitations of traditional psychiatry's approach to hearing voices.

1987 – After TV talk show appearance over 700 voice hearers respond to call for experiences.

The Talk show announces that Utrecht, will be hosting the first World Hearing Voices Conference.



One in Ten People Hear Voices at some point in their lives...Research shows “good copers”:



**Feel themselves to be stronger than their voices.**



**Communicate more often about and to their voices.**



**Set limits and listen selectively to their voices.**



**Use fewer distraction techniques.**

Accepting Voices, Romme & Escher



1988 – First Hearing Voices group forms in Manchester, England

2007 – [intervoiceonline.org](http://intervoiceonline.org) -HVN grows worldwide



2007 – In a partnership with Professor Gail Hornstien and the WMRLC, the longest consecutively running Hearing Voices Group in the US starts in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

2010 - US launches [hearingvoicesusa.org](http://hearingvoicesusa.org), joining 26 countries





# The Bay Area Hearing Voices Network

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE. HEALING. HOPE.



**History:** Launched in 2014, building on the past work of organizers in the greater San Francisco area. Current members of the BAHVN board include peers, family members, advocates, researchers and clinicians.

**Mission Statement:** Bay Area Hearing Voices Network seeks to expand public awareness, provide community support, and refuge for those who hear voices, see visions, and experience other forms of extraordinary perception.

[www.bayareahearingvoices.org](http://www.bayareahearingvoices.org)

# HVN Around The World

- Australia
- Austria
- Belgium
- Bosnia/  
Herzegovina
- Brazil
- Canada
- Denmark
- England
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Holland
- Ireland
- Italy



- Japan
- Kenya
- Malaysia
- Malta
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Palestine
- Scotland
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Tanzania
- Uganda
- United States of  
America
- Wales

The 11<sup>th</sup> World Hearing Voices Congress will be in Montreal, Canada, November 2019.



# HVN Groups Around the US





# Research by Marius Romme and Sandra Escher documents that:



70 to 90% of people who report **hearing voices** also report experiencing **trauma** (predominately childhood sexual abuse.)



- Romme and Escher have been preeminent leaders in examining the relationship of trauma to the experience of hearing voices for over a quarter century.





# Addressing Silence and Shame

- Studies now indicate primarily these two factors mitigate who will develop **distressing** voices in response to a trauma later in life.



# “Do your ADL’s!!!” (Avoiding Shame and Silence)



- Instead of punishing or removing privileges for people not doing what we want (like taking a shower)... ***focus on figuring out “why”... what is the fear? What is the barrier?***
- Instead of centering the problems in individual flaws (“you’re just having delusions”)... ***address the situations that beliefs/emotions are in response to.***
- Avoid “trigger culture” shut-downs... ***allow space for the expression of difficult life experiences and challenging emotions***



Well funded ongoing brain research continues to demonstrate that:

There are no structural or chemical brain differences discovered in those who hear voices that are distinct from trauma survivors...



*(Or cannot be attributed to the long-term use of anti-dopaminergic drugs)*



## Evaluating Research

Is it really in your  
Genes?

**LACKING REPLICABILITY:** No gene study has ever been replicated versus ACE study and other trauma studies which have been replicated over and over.

**LACKING CORRELATIVE POWER:** Gene studies often indicate correlation of around 2% between gene expression with diagnosis versus 500% in trauma studies.





# BUILDING POWER IN RELATIONSHIP TO PAST TRAUMA

- Neurofeedback and EMDR.
- Dialogue and Group Process that involves talking about BOTH traumatic events and accessing emotions.
- Connecting with animals.
- Drumming, Singing in a choir, making music.
- Yoga, meditation and other forms of spiritual practice.
- Building community and relationships.





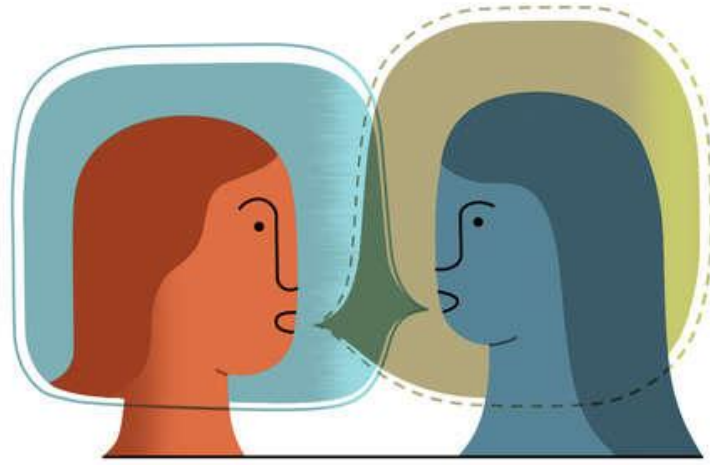
Hearing voices is **not** a sign of illness.

Hearing voices is a normal, though deeply personal, variation of human experience.

About 1 in 10 people hear voices at some point in life.

1/3rd of voice hearers **never** seek psychiatric services.





Hearing voices makes sense in relation to our personal life experiences...



...the problem is not hearing voices itself, but the difficulty with navigating the experience.



People who hear voices can cope with their experiences by owning and making meaning of their voices, dialogue with our voices is encouraged...



...And can change the relationship we have with our voices.





A more just and accepting society for people who hear voices improves our ability to have empowered relationships with our voices and lead free and happy lives...



Discrimination and exclusion of people who hear voices must end.



# HVN - A Paradigm Shift...

## \*Talking with people helps!

Particularly those who have similar experiences and who have learned to manage and integrate it.

Particularly in a safe (judgement free, non fear based, non pathologizing) place.



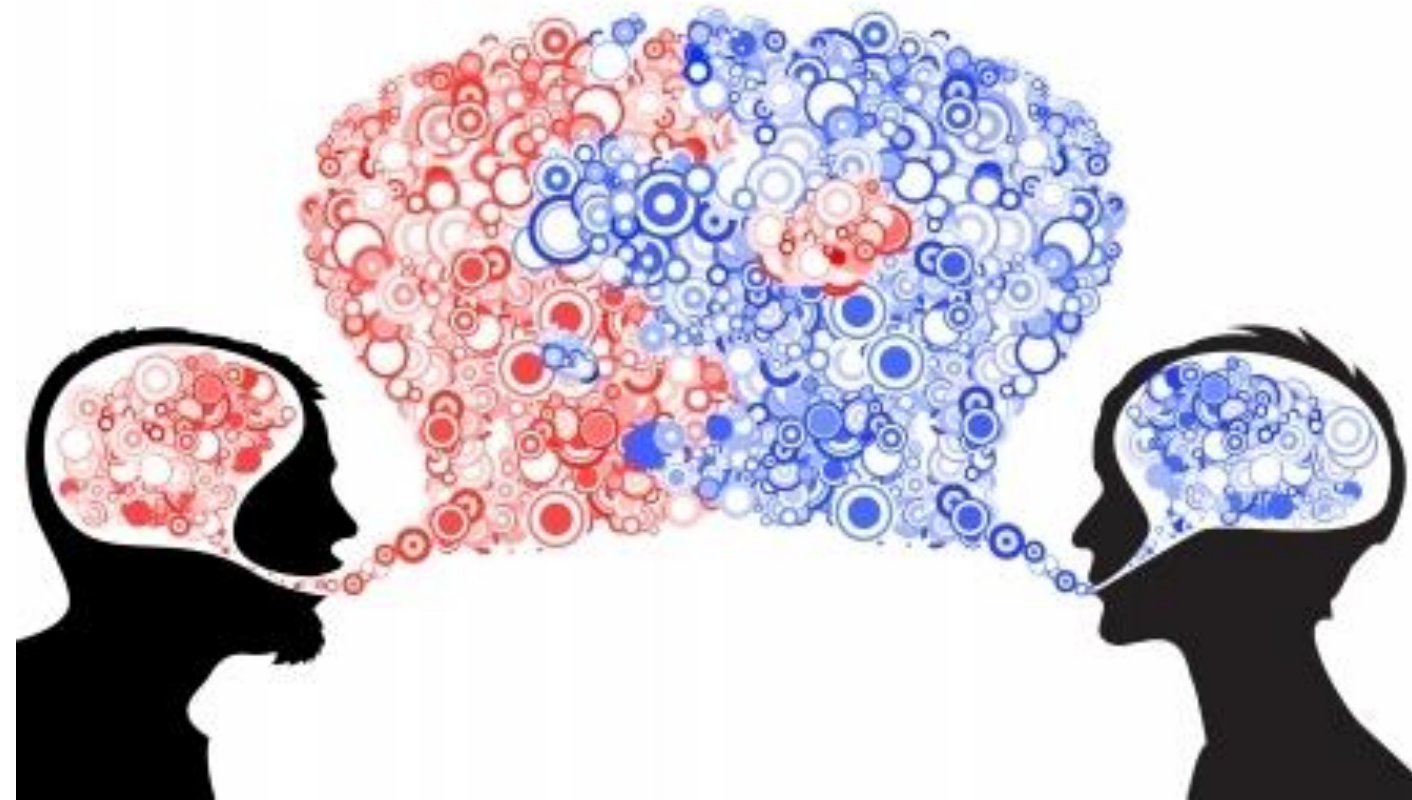
\*Acknowledgment that the experience is **REAL** and makes sense in the context of someone's life.

**SHIFTING**  
THE **POWER**

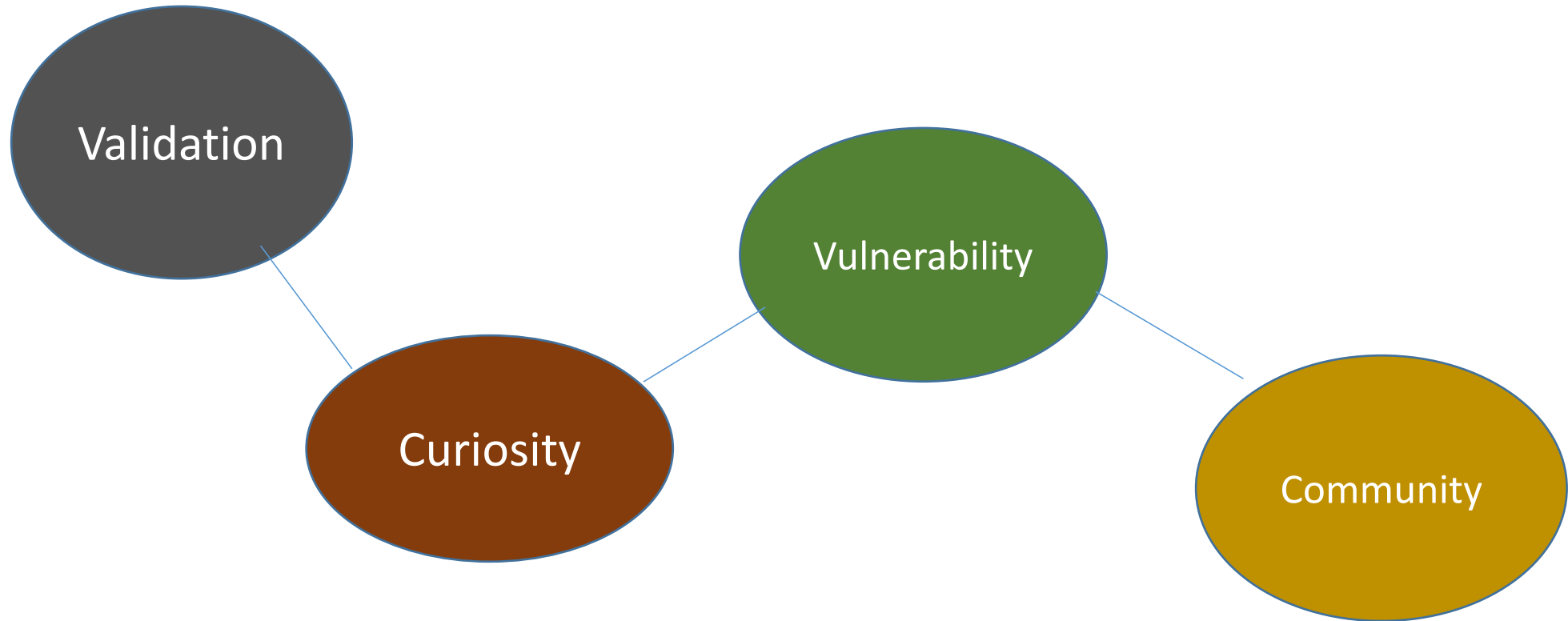


# Role Play...

Two Conversations



# If CONNECTION and MEANING is the DESTINATION... What is our Road Map?





# Validation

“That sounds so hard to be hearing a voice that is yelling at you with so much anger...”

# Curiosity

“Can I ask does the voices sound familiar to you at all?”

# Vulnerability

“In my own life, it has been very difficult to sit with angry feelings, particularly my own.”

# Community

“Are there any places or activities that seem to soothe the voice?” “Has anyone else tried addressing the voice?”



# Cindy Marty's Story



# The Startling Response

- This occurs when people are still overwhelmed by the “strange new experience of hearing voices.” Typically, the voices may be so frightening and/or so unfamiliar that it leads to confusion.



# Distraction/Blocking

- Getting Physical
- Using headphones
- Brain games
- Sub vocalizing
- Meditation
- Wearing sunglasses
- Affirmations
- Loud music
- Ear plugs

**LOOK!**  
**A Distraction!**





# Organizing the Experience



- This occurs when the person hearing voices has accepted the experience and is looking for ways to manage/deal with them. They are ready to own their voices.



# Discovering the Meaning

- Not necessarily taking voices literally but looking for their message.
- Looking at the context of the experience.
- Voice mapping.
- Asking when do they come and in relation to what.
- Sharing your experience at Hearing Voices groups and asking for feedback.



# The Roots of Maastricht Interview

- Also developed by Marius Romme, Sandra Escher, and Patsy Hage.
- Sometimes used in clinical settings.

A tool that supports people understanding their experience in the **context** of their life.

How many voices do you hear? **What do your voices say?** **Are they present when you feel certain emotions?**

**Are you able to have a conversation with your voices?** **Who do YOU think your voices might be?** What time of day do you hear them?



# Voice-Mapping

\*How old does the voice sound?

\*Gender?

\*What does the voice say and how?

\*Does the voice sound like anyone you know?

\*What are the voice's values?

\*When is the voice more present?

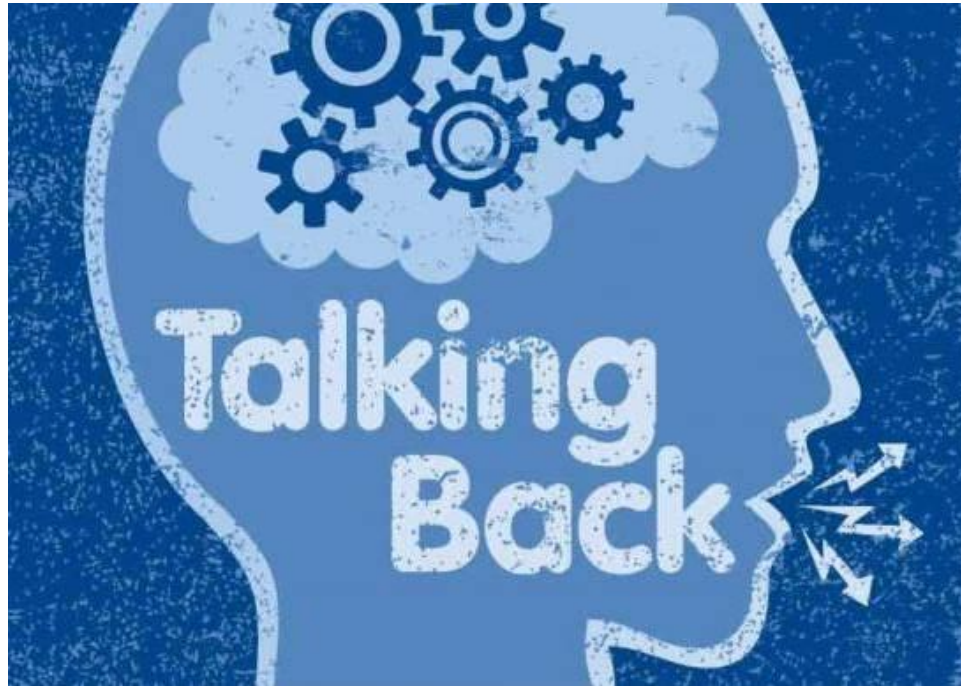
\*When did the voice first come along?

\*What was happening in your life at the time?

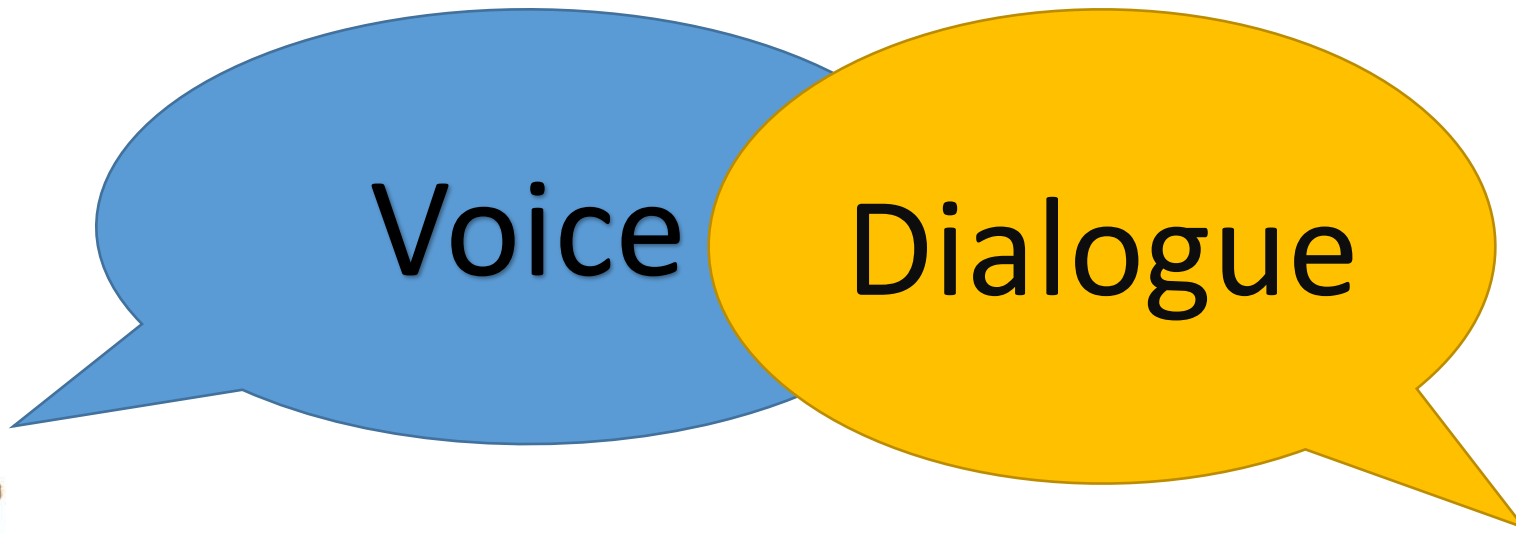
\*What could be significant life events?



# Negotiation



- Talking back to the voices.
- Making an appointment with the voices.
- Half-way attempts to comply with the voices.
- Attending to the voices. (What do they want or need?)
- Not feeling obligated to do what the voices tell you.
- Testing the Voice's power



Originally innovated in the 70's by Hal and Sidra Stone as way to explore different "selves."

Adapted for voice-hearers through the work of Rufus May.





# Voice Dialogue Styles



## TRANSLATOR

Facilitator: “Caroline, can you ask Voice how long he has been in your life?”

(give space for Voice to respond)

Caroline: *translating what Voice says in own words* He says he has been in my life for a long time.

## REPORTER

Facilitator: “Voice, how long have you been in Caroline’s life?”

(give space for Voice to respond)

Caroline: *reporting what Voice says verbatim* “Caroline was so small and I was always there”.

# Voice Dialogue Example Questions..

- How are you?
- What is your job?
- What do you want for .....?
- What would ..... 's life be like if you were not there?
- How does ..... relate to you?
- How long have you been in ..... 's life?
- What's it like to care for .....?
- Would you like anything to change in your relationship with .....?
- Do you have any advice for .....?



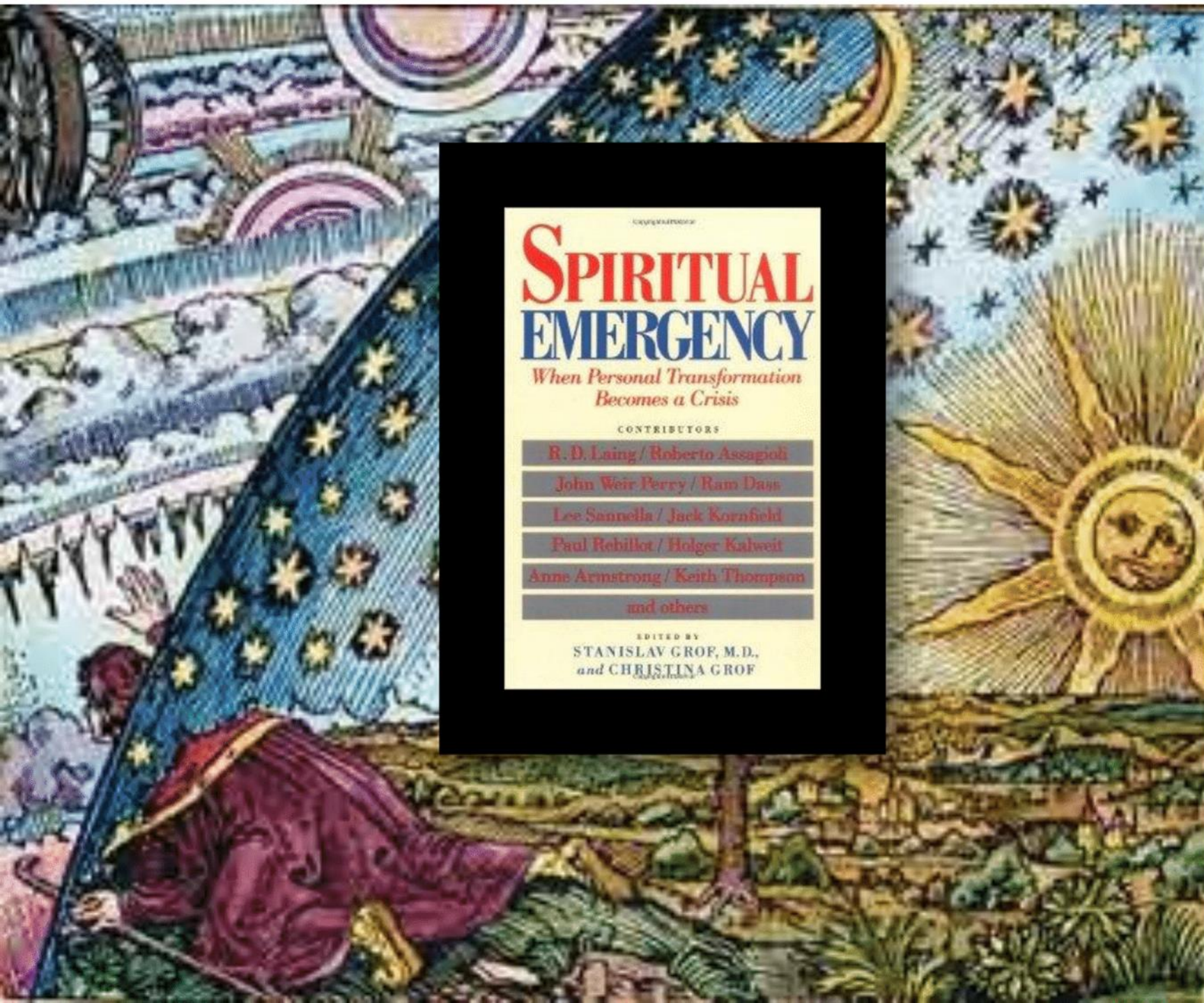
# Support for Various Frameworks

Researching particular beliefs and phenomena that one is experiencing.

**For example:** Blocking electromagnetic waves, interpreting alien transmissions, and/or house clearing for distressing spiritual experiences.







**SPIRITUAL  
EMERGENCY**

*When Personal Transformation  
Becomes a Crisis*

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*Kundalini Awakening*

*Shamanic  
Initiation*

*Divine Messages*

*Psychic Abilities*

Communication with  
Deceased Ancestors

# Social Adaptations



- Using a cell phone to talk to voices.
- Using headphones to discourage others from engaging with you.
- Saying you are hard of hearing to explain why you may ask someone to repeat themselves.
- Texting instead of talking.



# Thriving with Voices



- This occurs when the relationship between the individual and the voices they are hearing has become more balanced. Anxiety is lower and people feel more in control. The voices are also seen more as belonging to the individual and have a message.

# STRATEGIES FOR THOSE PROVIDING SUPPORT

- Take care of yourself – who is your support system?
- Start with basic needs: food, water, sleep, shelter
- Asking what the person you are supporting is looking for in terms of help... What is it that they want to work on? What do they want to achieve in life? What do they perceive is getting in the way?
- Being transparent and own your own needs, concerns, feelings. “I” statements work great! Modeling vulnerability creates connection and new ways forward.

# MORE STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTERS

- Curiosity keeps the lines of communication open – judgment or agenda-driven questioning can shut it down.
- How does the person you are supporting understand their experiences? What are their fears, emotions? Nothing ends a conversation quicker than “You’re wrong!”
- Support with looking for the metaphor and context of voices.



# BEING A BRIDGE VS. A LIFE RAFT



- Share resources
- Support the person to build a broader network of support
- Understand that you cannot “fix” it... but in community we begin to heal and find purpose



# Key Values

- No assumption of illness.
- The goal isn't necessarily to get rid of voices.
- No assumption that voices are bad or can't be helpful.



# Core Beliefs



- The problem is not hearing voices but how people cope with it.
- There are many ways to understand and make meaning of hearing voices.
- Many paths for moving forward.



# Goals of the Hearing Voices Network



- Raising awareness about voice hearing, visions and other unusual or extreme experiences.
- Creating opportunities for personal understanding and making meaning.
- Expanding access through development of new groups and ways to connect.



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The Bay Area Hearing Voices Network

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