

How to manage unusual experiences?

What are unusual experiences?

- **Hearing voices** – some people hear a voice or many voices that is separate to their own internal voice. You may or may not recognise these voices. These voices may be comforting or funny but some can be critical and command you to do things you don't want to do
- **Unusual beliefs** – some people have strongly held beliefs that are out of the ordinary or there is no evidence to back them up. Some people call these **delusions** or being **paranoid**. For example you may think you're being followed or watched. You may think you are in danger or that someone is controlling you outside of yourself
- **Hallucinations** - where you **see, feel, smell** or **hear** things that aren't there
- **Delusions** - a false belief that nobody else shares and is shown not to be true e.g. beliefs that there is a conspiracy against you

Important to know that sometimes the term **unusual experiences** is also known as '**psychosis**'.

These unusual experiences can result in young people:

- feeling worried and confused
- having muddled thoughts
- having difficulties concentrating
- feeling low or anxious
- having difficulties maintaining friendships/relationships
- feeling different to others

However, just because you experience one or more of these symptoms, **it doesn't mean you're definitely suffering from mental health difficulties.**

1. These experiences often begin in our teenage years, but can also sometimes start in childhood or in adult life. Some people only have one type of unusual experience, while others may have various different ones. Some people have unusual experiences every now and again, and for others they are ongoing.

What people think of these experiences also varies. Some people find them interesting or pleasant; others find them scary or upsetting.

2. Often, unusual experiences are responses to things that happened to us in the past or are challenging for us to manage in the present.

Unusual experiences, like hearing voices or feeling paranoid, are understandable when we think about what a person has been through. Unusual experiences might be related to; stress, things that happened to us from growing up, having been bullied or being discriminated against because of race, disability, religion/belief, sexuality or gender.



3. Unusual experiences are **more common than you might think** and are not always signs of mental health difficulties.

For some cultures/religious groups, unusual experiences are a normal feature of human life that can add value and meaning instead of being seen as 'bad' or something to be ashamed of.

4. But, unusual experiences can be **confusing and upsetting**. They might make us feel low or anxious, interfere with day to day activities, or affect our relationships with friends, families and romantic partners. They can also make work/school/college more difficult or make it harder for people to look after themselves.

Top tips

- If you are hearing voices or experiencing other types of hallucinations which you are finding confusing or worrying, it is important to let someone know and get help, support and advice. It can be really hard to speak to other people about unusual experiences. Talk to someone you trust such as a parent, carer, teacher or your GP as it will be helpful to make sense of it
- Alcohol and drugs can make symptoms such as hallucinations or not being sure what is real or not real, worse. Avoid drinking alcohol or using substances like cannabis
- Lack of sleep or disrupted sleep, not eating or drinking properly or high levels of stress can also make hallucinations worse. It is important for physical and mental wellbeing to look after yourself
- Try to have a balanced daily routine, have a good night time routine and eat and drink regularly. Relaxing is also important so make sure you have time to chill out during stressful times



Check out our pages on relaxation and sleeping difficulties for some extra guidance.

If you encounter any of the unusual experiences as previously mentioned, remember, it is OK, and you're not alone as many other young people experience unusual experiences too!

Some useful websites

Childline – Hearing voices for more information

You can start a 1-2-1 chat from 9am-10.30pm. Or, you can call 08001111 for free from 9am-3.30am.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/mental-health/hearing-voices/>

Kooth is an online mental wellbeing community. You can access free, safe and anonymous support.

<https://www.kooth.com>

Voice Collective is a project set up to support children and young people who hear voices, see visions or have other unusual sensory experiences

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

Check out their support tab and ask a parent/ carer or staff member in school if you would like support in accessing their services.