

## **Defusing Aggressive Voices**

### **(Rufus May, with Alessandra Santoni and Marcello Macario)**

This workshop will be about facing challenging voices and decoding their messages. I want to look at different ways we can overcome our fear of terrorising voices and the hidden stories they are pointing us towards. This is about shifting the power balance between the voice hearer and the intimidating vocal (and sometimes visual or sensory presences) they experience. With solidarity we can find ways of making peace with these disaffected messengers, the voices. I believe we should be helping voice hearers developing the strength to turn difficult voices into allies to the recovery journey.

#### Dialoguing with voices

This is 'voice diplomacy' a process where we see challenging voices as ambassadors of lost emotions. By listening to and dialoguing with persistent voices in a structured way we can learn what we need to do to be more free of fear and dogma. To deal with dominating voices we need to find ways to be more grounded more aware and to reclaim responsibility for our emotions.

We fear what we don't understand what we can't control, we fear being harmed, being judged, and being rejected. Terrorising voices give us lots of clues about what we need to strengthen in ourselves. For example critical voices may be telling us about the need for self respect and self acceptance. Voices that make moral judgments are often showing there is a an unmet need for reconciliation with past events.

When we realise what we need to rethink, through creative practices such as role-play and even poetry we can move from judging ourselves to grieving our losses and becoming compassionate to our past. We may need to give up being in control and learn in stead how to be confident in our ability to respond flexibly to our inner and outer world: To bravely and compassionately face our experience.

#### The values underpinning the voices

How do we learn from frightening voices? How do we listen deeply to voices so we can undo knots that have been tied in the past? Aggressive voices are using tragic methods to communicate hidden needs and needs: Desires to express pain, desires to take power back, needs for self acceptance and understanding.

Looking at the values of the voices will help us see the work we have to do on our self perception and our self expression. We can ask: What is the work we can do to strengthen our confidence and self acceptance in relation to these values?

I will look at how we can invite voices to join us in positive activities (and develop the ability to set firm boundaries with them) such as exercises, relaxation, creativity, mindfulness, emotional freedom technique, yoga, enjoying nature, and purposeful activity.

#### Integrating the past and the present

How can we review the social relationships that the voices symbolise so that we can see ourselves with understanding and respect? How can we welcome our memories our thoughts our voices into the here and now? How can we embrace the here and now and not be dominated by memories from the past. This involves a careful balance between investing in wholesome activities and relationships in the present and in manageable chunks making peace with our past.

Because aggressive voices are telling us about past injustices if we listen to voices in a constructive way, we as communities can learn how to live more fairly and peacefully.