

Working with the voices

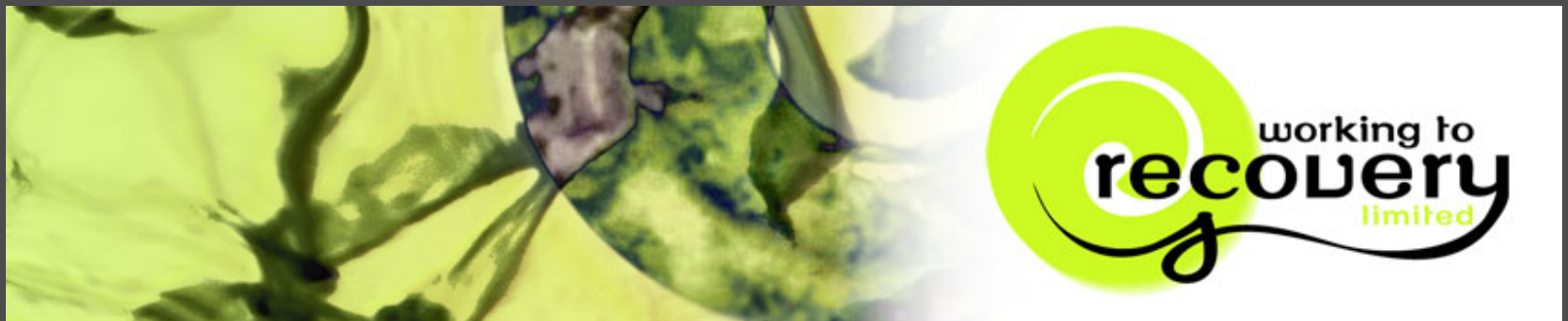
A course for voice hearers and
professionals

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Rufus May

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Programme

first day

- Introduction Rufus
- Accepting and making sense of voices Rufus
- Voice dialogue theory Dirk
- Construct: the meaning of the voices Eleanor
- Personal experience of voice hearing Eleanor
- Talking with the voices Dirk

Accepting and making sense of voices

Rufus

Stages

1. Safety
2. Making sense
3. Social reconnection

Voice Dialogue Theory

Your Selves

Many individual selves, each with its own way of perceiving the world, each with its own personal history, physical characteristics, emotional and physical reactions, and opinions on how we should run our lives.

We are all made up of multiple personalities - all of us with no exceptions!

An operating ego of some sort that can observe and reflect on the fact that we are not a single psychological entity

(Hal Stone)

Different Selves

Primary (= dominant) selves

versus

Disowned (= repressed) selves

Organised in opposites

Selves Subpersonalities Energies

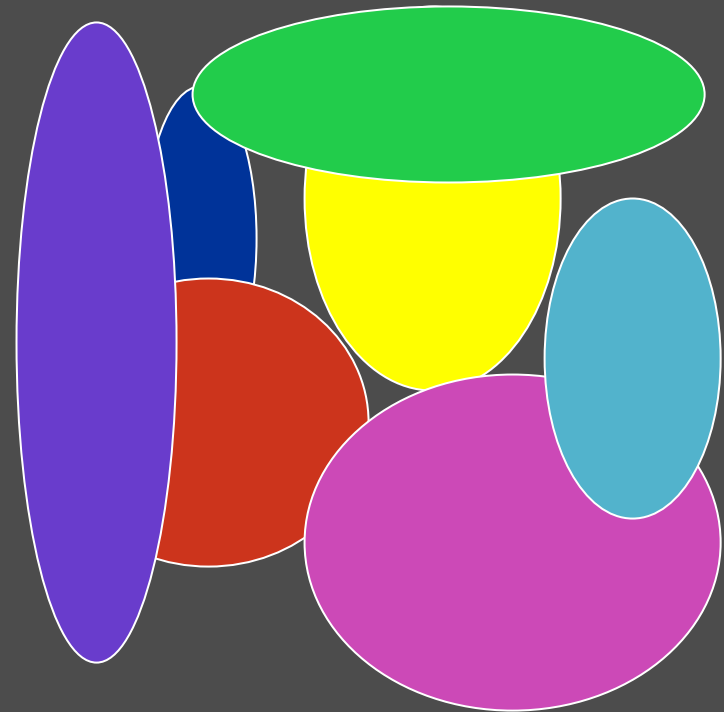
- No one is bad or good
- All have a function for the person
- Primary selves are there to protect
- Originated in situations where protection was needed

It is important to acknowledge that!

Primary (= dominant) Selves

examples

- Pleaser
- Impersonal
- Inner Critic
- Controller
- Judge
- Rational Mind
- Pusher



Inner Critic

- This Inner Critic is a "self", a separate subpersonality, that criticizes them before their parents - or anyone else, for that matter - can!
- This Inner Critic is extremely anxious, almost desperate, for them to succeed in the world and to be accepted and liked by others.
- The Inner Critic does not know when enough is enough. It has a tendency to grow until it is out of control and begins to undermine us and to do real damage. At this point, its original intent gets lost.

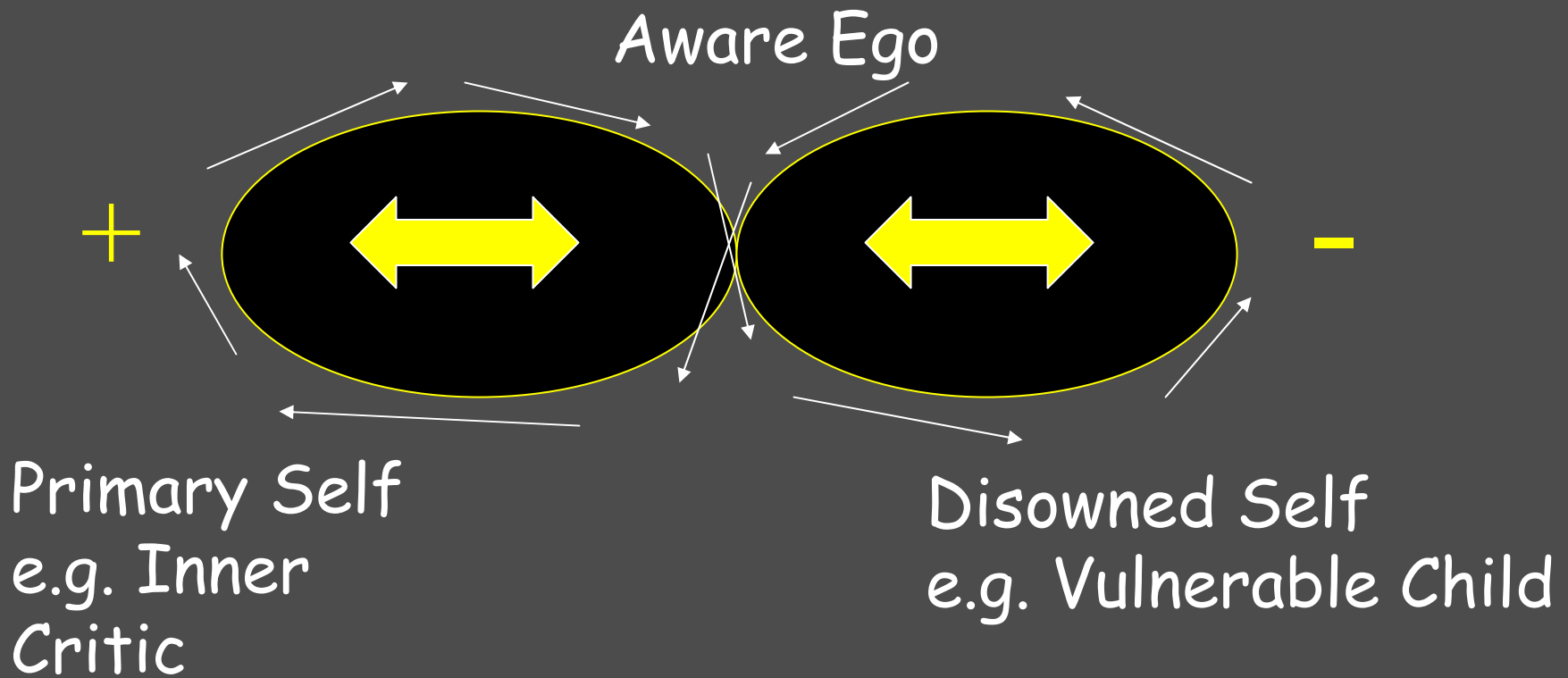
Disowned Selves

examples

- Inner Child
- Instinctive energies
- Personal
- Rejected Child
- Contemplation
- Playfull Child



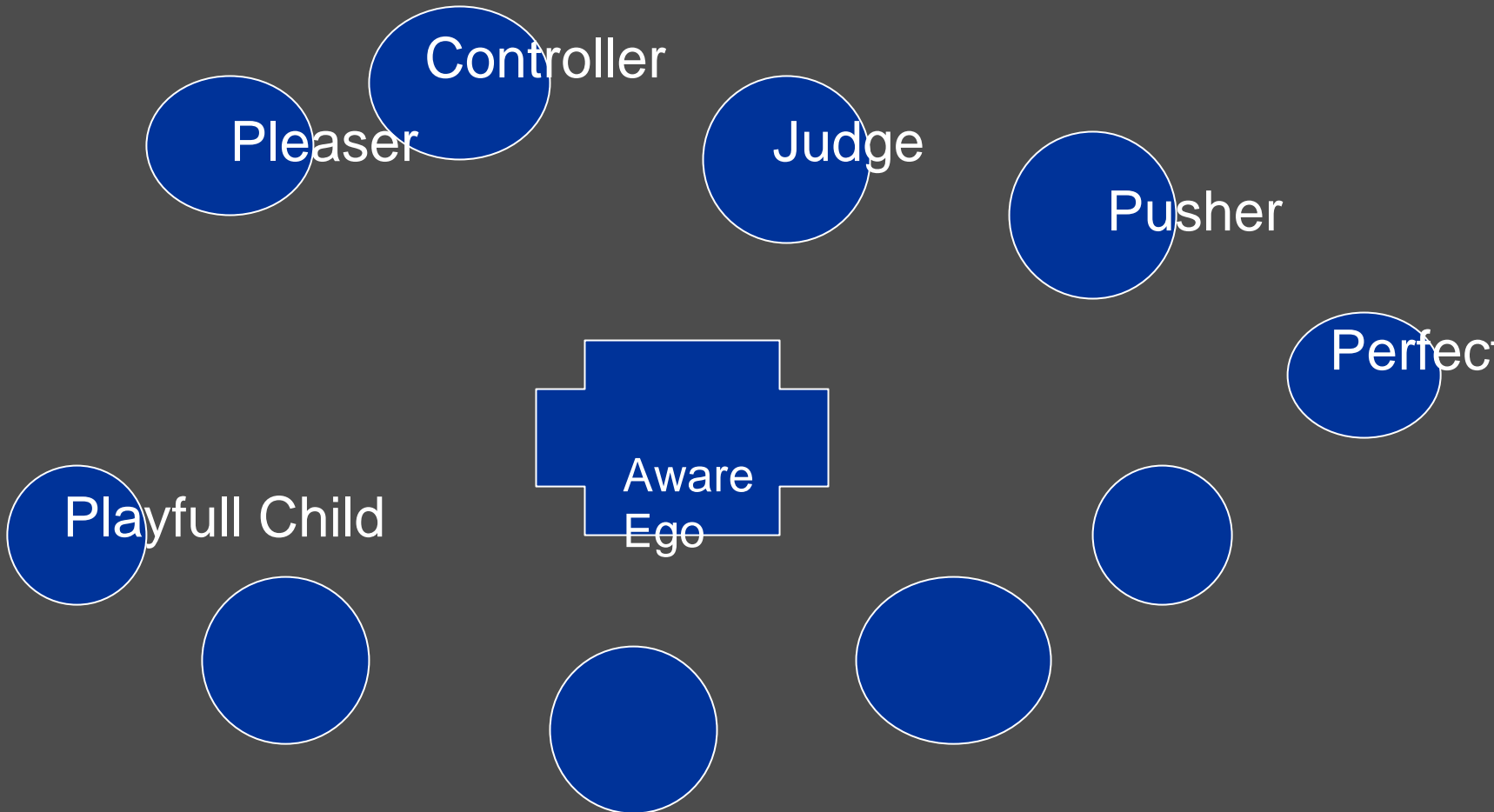
Lemniscate



Non-violent communication

- What's happening
- Feelings
- Needs
- Make a request

Operating ego



Exercise

Write down (max 4 of) your primary selves.

Describe these to your neighbour.

Describe some of your actions when these primaries are in charge.

Share some of it in the group.

Burn-out

The primary selves worked too hard to protect
you.

They are exhausted.

The disowned selves are unprotected.

You cannot take care for the disowned selves
because you don't know them.

You can learn to protect them in a more realistic
way.

Voices

Voice: 'You are worthless, you would be better of dead'.

The ultimate protector in a situation that all primary selves failed. A reaction to life stresses, when experiences are overwhelming, in a vulnerable person.

Translated: 'don't feel anymore, don't be anymore'.

Or: 'don't live this life anymore, live a new life'.

A positive interpretation

Voice
Dialogue
Practice

Practice

- Facilitation: *exploration* **not** changing the subpersonalities
- The facilitator helps each self to clarify its views and to give as much information as possible
- Promote Aware Ego / Distance / Space
- Engage with the subpersonalities
 - What is your name, how old are you, how long are you in the life of..., do you like it, what is your work, who do you like, what if you weren't there, do they like you, etc....
- Acknowledgement/validation/embracing of the selves

Practice

- Returning to the Ego position
- Awareness
- Working through after the session

Break

Exercise

- Take someone in mind that you really dislike
- Share it with your neighbour
- Some examples in the group

Making a construct Breaking the code

Give meaning to the voices

Dia-gnosis

The basis of the construct

- Identity of the voices
- Characteristics of their communication
 - the way of talking
 - age of the voices
 - what they have to tell.
- What triggers the appearance of the voices
- What important change in their life was related to the beginning of the hearing of voices
- Characteristics of their upbringing during their youth and any special experiences that occurred in that period

The two questions

Who do the voice(s) represent?

What problem(s) do the voice(s)
represent?

The construct

Is an idea about the meaning of the voices that the helper and the voice hearer work on together

An example

- Joyce, 62 years old, married, 3 children.
- Identity of the voices:
 - 3 voices: The chaplain (35), Mother (45) and Charles (50). They all kept the same age.
- Characteristics:
 - chaplain: from nice to humiliating (like in her youth). Comes especially when she likes something.
 - Mother: Always negative. Confirms what the chaplain says, except when he says nice things.
 - Charles: A positive voice. Her therapist. Gives her advice.

Joyce

- Content:
 - chaplain: You're a devils child. You're not worth anything. You are lazy.
 - Mother: You're not worth to live. You are ugly. You will achieve nothing.
 - Charles: Don't go with them, kick them out.
- Triggers: Being happy. Going into a church. Angry about the church.

Joyce

- History of the voices:
 - chaplain developed from a childish voice to the chaplain when she was abused by him. This voice started when she was 10 years old. Till her 30th she heard this voice. Than she decided to take care of her children. When she was 50 she collapsed. The other voices came gradually.
 - Mother: when she was 50.
 - Charles: During therapy.

Joyce

- Youth: Born in 1941 (war), the 6th child of 8. Mother didn't want her. Mother was harsh and cold. Joyce was bullied at school.
- Abused by the chaplain.

Construct

- Who represent the voices:
 - chaplain, the abuser
 - Mother, the one who had to learn her to cope with life.
 - Therapist: the one who supported her.

Construct

- What problem(s) do the voices represent:
 - The fear to feel, to be a person, to be happy.
 - The need for support from others.

Another Example

Erica

- **Identity:** 45 year old male. The voice developed with her, stayed 3 years older. The age appeared the same as the age of her eldest brother.
- **Characteristics:** Commenting, she should hang herself, being a bad mother, not allowed to become angry. (The only situation to become angry is on a psychiatric ward, she will be fixated than)

Erica (2)

- **Triggers:** Emotions of others and guilt feelings.
- **History of the voices:** She was 14 yrs old. Father was drunk and hit mother and brother, she interfered and was insulted by her father. She felt rejected by him.
- **History of her youth:** “I had to be good and friendly” Mother was demanding and humiliating. With father she had a good relationship. She was hit by her oldest brother and mother for a long time. He told her that the family would be better off if she shouldn't exist.

Erica (3)

- **Who represents the voice:** The eldest brother. He is also 45 yrs old. Now she has a reasonable good relationship with him. The voice resembles the things her brother used to say to her.
- **What problem is the voice representing:** Her weak identity, not being able to express anger adequately, not being allowed to take care for herself, dependent on the approval of others, lack of selfapproval.

Exercise

- Write down some reasons why you developed some of your primary selves
- Share it with you neighbour
- Share some of it with the group

Start a learning process: to approach the voices differently

Eleanor

1. Focus on the most challenging aspects of the voices and select practical coping strategies and practice these systematically.
2. Understanding the relationship with difficult emotions and exercise alternative coping with that emotions.
3. Understanding the relationship with events that have been difficult to accept. Work through anxiety and guilt.

What do the voices really mean?

- They point at real life problems in the past and the present
- They use metaphorical language that can be translated into real life challenges
- Split off feelings, feelings that are unbearable
- Awful messages about terrifying past experiences

Lunch

Eleanor

Personal experiences with voices

Talking with the voices

Why the voice dialogue model and approach are suitable for working with voices

Exercise

What do you need to feel safe?

- From yourself
- From others
- From your environment
- Share that with your neighbour

Why is voice dialogue important for working with voices? (Rufus)

- It is not oriented towards “illness” nor is it focused upon discovering what is wrong
- It offers a neutral but assertive attitude to work with voices - acceptance is the core
- It offers a positive model for the existence of voices
- The Inner Critic is a very familiar concept to voice hearers
- In voice dialogue the Inner Critic is not an enemy
- Voice dialogue helps to build up an Aware Ego - some distance towards the voices - a more fruitful relationship between voices and voicehearer

Therapeutic conditions for voice dialogue with voices

- There is a capacity for dialoguing with the voice(s).
- This method cannot be used in the first phase of voice hearing when the voice hearer is still overwhelmed by the voices and he/she is too afraid for them.
- The voice hearer should be curious and open minded; also has to feel safe with the therapist.
- Voice hearer and facilitator are respectful accepting each others attitude.
- The therapist and the voicehearer feel safe.

Voice dialogue with voices

- Ask the voices if they agree (motivational work)
- The voicehearer is the owner
- Make clear you're not their enemy
- Non-judgmental / Common sense attitude
- You want to learn to know the voices
- Respect but not submissiveness
- **Honesty** (about your own motives and feelings)

How to apply the method?

- Start by asking the voice hearer how the voices would feel about talking to them
- Give an extensive explanation about the method and its purpose
- Inform the voice hearer that the voices should agree to talk
- Give examples of positive experiences with the method to stimulate interest

How to apply the method?

- Make voice hearer and voices aware that there might be an advantage: to understand each other better, a better relationship inbetween.
- If the voice hearer wants to stay in control, the therapist can speak indirectly to the voices, asking questions and answers that are formulated by the voice hearer (as an interpreter).
- Before you start, have a discussion with the voice hearer about which voice wants to speak to you first. Preferably start with a familiar and not too threatening one.

Questions to be asked during the session

- Who are you? Do you have a name?
- How old are you?
- Does the voice hearer know you?
- When did you come in the life of (name of voice hearer)?
- What was the reason or your motive for you to come to (name)?
- What were the circumstances at that time in the life of (name)?

Questions to be asked during the session

- What did you have to do to protect (name) ?
- What do you want to achieve for (name)?
- What would happen with (name) if you would not be there?
- How does (name) relate to you?
- How is it to take care for (name)?
- Would you like something to change in your relationship with (name)?
- What do you need from (name)?

Closure

- When questions are answered thank the voices for the explanations.
- When the facilitator wants to stop the dialogue, he asks if the voice does not mind to close the talk and perhaps wants to have another talk another time.
- After the permission the facilitator says goodbye to the voice, summarizes what was talked about and he can make another compliment.
- The facilitator then asks the voice hearer to return to his own chair.
- Reflect together with the voice hearer about what happened.

Closure

- Facilitator and voice hearer discuss how it feels and what the voice hearer thinks about what the voices said.
- If the voice hearer does not remember what the voice has said (has possibly dissociated), the facilitator then tells about what the voice talked about.
- Awareness: The facilitator, with the voicehearer next to him, tells what he saw happening.
- Stimulate the voice hearer to continue to make contact with the voice(s)
- In advance questions to the voices for the next session.

Aims

- Exploration of the underlying motives
- Gathering information
- To make the voice-hearer feel distance
- Enhance a more healthy dialogue
- Solve conflicts
- Find what kind of action is needed
- Start an internal process of change
- Voices are a solution to a problem

Starting

Awareness

Exercise

Mindfulness

Two case examples

Marc

Karen

Messages

- Voices have a protective function, e.g. don't feel, be dead, as ultimate protection, but destructive in nature
- This protective function can be transformed in a more supportive nature, □the person takes back responsibility for caring for their vulnerability

Marc

- Man, 22, single
- Latin and Greek
- Job: mechanic, 2 years
- Psychosis
- Several hospitals, therapeutic community
- Obsessive compulsive behaviour
- Referral

Marc

- Several voices, one remained -> commit suicide
- Male voice (all day)
- Told him to jump in front of a train.
Comments and critical remarks.

Marc

- Dialogue with the voice
- Wanted to make him more aggressive
- Talked about how to achieve this goal
- “Teacher”
- Amnesia for the conversation
- More voices
- Listening every day a few hours
- Relation with the past

Marc

- Medication
- Support
- Parents
- Homework
- Relationship
- Job

Karen

- Female, 28 years, married
- Four years in hospital, rehabilitation program
- High dose of neuroleptics, no effect on the voices
- Well educated -> secretary
- Limited social network
- Christian background

Karen

- Four male voices
- Tell her to cut herself. Comment on everything. She has to listen and obey. Limit her daily functioning.
- She decided not to harm herself

Karen

- Conversation with the four voices apart
- Venting anger
- Before 20 yrs supportive, thereafter destructive
- About how to achieve goals
- Make time for talking and listening to the voices
- Talked to each other
- Diary
- Selfhelp group

Karen

- 5 sessions
- Talked a lot with the voices -> another dialogue
- Two voices disappeared
- Medication tapered off
- Referred to her own rehabilitation worker
- Gave birth and moved to another part of the country
- No voices anymore Later: one positive voice

Goals for voice dialogue

- To explore the primary selves
- To give space to the disowned selves
- To find a new balance
- Develop an aware ego
- To know your selves better
- To use your selves better
- To embrace your selves

Voices

The psychology of selves

- What you ignore persists, what you look at can disappear (David Walsh)
- If you're not allowed to do your job you go either underground or in opposition
- Then a voice can develop, when a self is rejected or not able to express itself
- The voice is a disowned self
- The voice uses metaphoric language that can be translated to 'the job'

Concluding remarks

- Hearing voices is a reality
- Voices can be solutions to specific problems
- The voices can be protective
- The dialogue between the voices and the voice hearer effects social functioning

Concluding remarks

- The voices give indications about emotional themes that are important to the social development of the voice hearer.
- Changing these dialogues by talking to the the voices can effect this development.

Thank you!

