



Children Hearing Voices

When I was asked to review *Did You Hear That?: Help for Children Who Hear Voices* as a paediatric psychiatrist, my first impression was that it is a really big book which is well illustrated. Colourful pictures and words fill each of its 160 pages. As I started to read it, it gave me the feeling that this was another book written from a Western viewpoint that didn't consider the cultural diversity that was relevant to Singapore. I was rather sceptical that this book could address the complex issue of children who hear voices, but was pleasantly surprised as I read through the examples of Susie, Carlos, Selma, Chang and Lala.

For our gentle readers, let me give you some background on the issue. Hallucinations are typically described as when one has an external perception that does not exist. These perceptions can be auditory (in things we hear), visual (in things we see) or even olfactory (in smells) and kinaesthetic (in things we touch and feel). Auditory hallucinations are the most common and unfortunately, doctors have been taught to consider this psychopathology as the hallmark of psychosis — a serious mental illness. This may indeed be the case when we deal with adults, but children may hear voices for a number of reasons. Trauma and adverse childhood experiences are common sources of these hallucinations. This review is not long enough to give you a thorough thesis on hallucinations versus imagination, but taken at face

value, hallucinations are experienced much like real perceptions and not just thoughts in the mind.

In this sense, Dr Seetha (who holds a doctorate in clinical psychology) has made the concept easy for children to understand and also provided good scaffolding for parents, therapists and other professionals working with children to broach the subject. It helps to clarify the notion of the subjective experience of a child in a non-threatening manner and also provides some common examples. One notable story missing would be on sexual abuse, that may also result in hallucinations. The supplementary questions on the bottom of some pages help to introduce talking points for adults to discuss with the child. In this sense, this is an excellent couch side book for working with children who complain that they are hearing voices, and I would recommend it to all my colleagues at the Child Guidance Clinic. My only regret is that we did not participate in the writing of this much needed addition to the global child mental health resources. ◆

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