

# *What is Voice Dialogue?*

By Mary Disharoon, MA, LMFT

Voice Dialogue is an easy and effective way to work with a life or relationship issue that you're dealing with. It helps you recognize and come to appreciate the various inner selves that are part of that issue, by giving them a chance to speak for themselves.

By using this method of personal growth, you'll become more conscious of your inner selves and learn to hold them with a new, powerful, centered awareness called the Aware Ego process.

Over time, the more you do Voice Dialogue and develop your Aware Ego process, you'll grow in your ability to manage all of who you are and make decisions that are more balanced and right for you.

This wonderful therapeutic method was developed by Drs. Hal and Sidra Stone, psychologists who now live in Albion, California.

Some of your inner selves are universal and common to most everyone, like an inner Child, an inner Critic, an inner Pusher, an inner Pleaser and an inner Teacher.

Other selves are more unique to each person, and can be recognized more as "the part of you that is feeling stuck" or "the part of you that overeats" or "the part of you that feels depressed" or "the part of you that takes over when something needs to get done."

Each inner self has its own point of view, and by experiencing them one at a time, you'll come to understand, appreciate and love yourself more completely.

This will positively affect your opinion of yourself and your ability to make decisions that work for you.

Voice Dialogue is not therapy in the traditional sense, although the outcome is definitely therapeutic. Many psychotherapists use this method as a tool when doing therapy, yet anyone can learn it and use it for personal or professional reasons.

Think for a moment about a current issue or situation in your life that you'd like to improve. Start to get in touch with the conflict and the different points of view you hold.

For example, you may want to go on a vacation but can't seem to choose between going someplace new with a friend, or instead, going back to your hometown to visit your family.

In a Voice Dialogue session, you could speak from these different parts of yourself that relate to this issue and be able to understand more fully what's going on.

When given a chance to speak, your Free Spirit self might let you know that she wants you to experience life according to what makes you happy. This part makes you feel light and excited. It's spontaneous and adventurous, and thrives on living out your dreams. This part of you wants to have a fun vacation where you will not be obligated to anyone, where you can totally relax, indulge yourself, let your hair down and come alive!

Your Responsible self is concerned with doing the right thing. This part makes you feel strong and focused. It's concerned and serious, and thinks life is about showing up and getting things accomplished. While planning your vacation, this part of you wants to fulfill the obligation of seeing your family. Perhaps your parents are aging and they haven't seen you in a while. This part of you would take that into consideration, and advise you to "do the right thing"!

By the time you finish your Voice Dialogue session, you will have met your inner Free Spirit and your inner Responsible self.

As you can imagine, these are two very different selves and they both are a part of you and have something important to offer you. Each has its own way of seeing the world and each has a different energetic effect on how you feel in your body. When they are in conflict with each other, they create a tug-of-war, activating feelings of confusion, frustration and guilt. An Aware Ego process can hold them as separate selves, and manage the tension they energetically create, while you decide what to do. And, once you're living into that decision, an Aware Ego process can help you handle the disappointment of the side that didn't get its way with you.

By doing Voice Dialogue, you can 1) separate out the different parts of yourself, 2) get to know and appreciate each one, 3) develop an Aware Ego process in relationship to them, and then 4) be able to make a conscious decision that takes each inner part's point of view into consideration.

*Thank you to Alice Morgan Simmonds, MFT, for her help in writing this article.*