

# Meet Your Inner Voices!

Have you ever seen the Pixar movie *Inside Out* where the protagonist, Riley, has a cast of colorful emotive characters in her head. It's natural and normal to have inner voices. For instance, have you ever said or thought like this:

"Part of me wants to do it, but part of me doesn't."

"My inner critic is really loud right now."

"It's like I keep hearing my second grade teacher's voice telling me I'm not going to amount to anything."

"A voice inside me keeps wishing I made a different choice."

Those are the inner voices I'm talking about. They often show up when we make a mistake, get feedback, want to do something controversial, compare ourselves to others, or sit at major crossroad in life.

There's often a lot of different voices, vying for attention and talking over one another. That can make one's mind feel really crowded with thoughts and make your inner experience really confusing. When there's a lot going on, the jumble of voices sometimes keep me up at night.

If this feels true for you, it's often very helpful to get to know and differentiate between the inner voices in your head. If you can approach them with an open mind, go really slow, and have lots of compassion, then you are likely to find that your voices actually have your best interest at heart. Inner voices aren't bad. They have deep inner wisdom for you, if you take the time to listen.

Moreover, you can start to differentiate between your Self — that is, the voice of the wise, experienced, resourced adult that you are at your very best — and those of the other inner voices that are clamoring for your attention.

There's many ways to get to know your inner voices. Here's one that often works well for people who like to journal, and are just starting to get to know their inner voices. It's called "Inner Dialogue". You'll be writing a dialogue between your Self and the Voice you want to get to know better.

## The Inner Dialogue process:

To begin, get a piece of paper and a pen. On it, write:

**Self:**

Now, put the pen aside and get nice and centered in whatever way works best for you. Do some yoga or breathing. Go for a walk in nature. Pray or meditate. Do what works for you. The goal is to become grounded in your true Self, the wise adult you are at your very best.

From that centered place, see if you can identify a specific, unique Voice in your head. It might help to think about something recent that happened recently that was emotional or challenging — a heartbreak, concern, conflict, worry, or big decision. Listen for a Voice that has something to say about it.

Imagine that you are welcoming this Voice to a conversation, a real, deep, get to know you, open-your-heart-up conversation. What question would you like to ask? How might the Voice respond? (See the next page for some ideas about questions to ask.)

When you are ready, begin a dialogue between your Self and the Voice, as if you were writing a play. The last page of this handout has an example dialogue from my own journal.

Tips:

- Write fast without analyzing what you are writing. First thought = best thought.
- Sometimes you have to earn the voice's trust. Go slow. Be gentle. Stay patient. You aren't trying to change anything at all about who the voice is or what it wants. Approach with compassion and genuine curiosity.
- Sometimes a different voice will try to interrupt or claim your attention. If that happens, stay focused on one voice at a time. Ask the interrupting voice to wait their turn. Promise to have just as deep a conversation with the new voice after you are done with the first one.
- Use abbreviations or initials to simplify the process. ("S" for Self and "V" for voice. Or "Me" for Self and "P" for part.)
- Don't worry about handwriting or grammar. Just let the dialogue flow.



## Questions you might want to ask:

### Get to know you:

- What/who do you sound like?
- What/who do you (the inner Voice) look like?
- How old are you?
- Does you have a name? What would you like to be called?
- Are you male, female, or something else (e.g. animal, color, spirit)?
- What's your personality like (e.g. shy, extroverted, angry, sad, bold)?

### Your inner voice's role:

- What are you most proud of?
- How do you serve Me/Self?
- What is your job?
- What matters most to you?
- When do you show up? When do you hide away?

### Your inner voice's burdens:

- What are you trying to protect Me/Self from?
- What are you most afraid of?
- What burdens are you carrying?
- Would you prefer to lay any of your burdens down if you could?
- If you could change roles, what role might you like to try instead?
- What, if anything, is stopping you?
- What mistakes have you made?
- What do you regret, if anything?

### What else:

- What else do you want Me to know about you?
- Is there anything you want to know about Me?

## Sample Inner Dialogue:

Self: Hi there voice who is angry and defensive. I'd love to get to know you. Tell me about yourself.

Voice: I'm a bit angry that you called me angry. I'm a fighter.

Self: What are you fighting for?

V: I defend the little people. Kids. YOUR kids. Ukrainians. Women. Minorities, LGBTQ. And yes, little Irene, too.

S: Defend them against what?

V: Anything that might hurt them. Russians. White men. And yes, sometimes that includes Jason. I defend you from your parents.

S: What do you look like?

V: I'm like a D&D barbarian. Fierce, wild, proud. Battle axe. Leather armor, wind in my hair.

S: What or who do you sound like?

V: Red rage. Spirit, Fire.

S: Why have I only met you so recently? There's other voices I've heard before but not yours.

V: You only stopped suppressing me on your retreat with Jay. I'm free now. Can't put the genie back.

S: Don't worry - I'm glad you're here. What should I call you?

V: Momma bear.

S: That makes me smile. Okay momma bear, what are you most proud of?

MB: Raising your kids. Keeping them safe from harm. And giving the downtrodden a voice when they can't speak for themselves.

S: Like with my blog.

MB: Exactly. Several people reached out after your last post about "That book" when you let me shine forth.

S: What burdens do you carry?

MB: Armor & battle axes get heavy. There's so much injustice. Too much to fight against.

S: Do you want to put any of that down?

MB: Perhaps. I can't fight it all.

S: So which parts are most important to you then?

MB: Your kids & little Irene. Clients.

S: Great. It's good to be clear on priorities. What are you most afraid of?

MB: The kids getting hurt. I AM mamma bear after all. It leads to conflict with Jason when we don't agree on what's best for the kids.

S: Anything else

MB: Being suppressed again.

S: Don't worry. I won't suppress you. But it's sometimes hard to feel angry or defensive.

MB: Yeah! Tell me about it.

S: Sounds exhausting.

MB: It is. I'd love to take a break now and then. But it's hard to let my guard down. What if they get hurt? I'd rather martyr & sacrifice myself than let that happen. But I also know that if I never let them defend themselves & get a little hurt, they'll never learn to survive on their own.

S: Tough dilemma. You do know that I'm here right?

MB: Yeah - but you're too busy.

S: I'm less busy than you might imagine. Maybe we could work together more.