

# Symptoms of Dissociation & Basic Coping Skills



Faith Foster, MSW Intern. Published by Hope Recovery.

## Dissociation

Dissociation is when the individual disconnects from their thoughts, feelings, environment, and memories. It can have an impact on your sense of self and perception of time. When you experience dissociation, it can be temporary and go away on its own or it can be persistent reoccurring and prolonged to where you may need treatment. It can become more severe if you've had a traumatic experience or if you have a mental health disorder. A few causes of dissociation can be trauma, hypnosis, certain medications, or meditation.

## Symptoms of Dissociation

The symptoms that may occur when you're experiencing dissociation could be:

- Having an out-of-body experience
- Feeling like you're a different person sometimes
- Feeling like your heart is pounding or you're lightheaded
- Feeling emotionally numb or detached
- Feeling little or no pain
- Having an altered sense of time
- Not remembering how you got somewhere
- Having tunnel vision
- Hearing voices in your head
- Having intense flashbacks that feel real
- Becoming immobile
- Getting absorbed into a fantasy world that seems real
- Feeling like your surroundings are unreal, dreamlike, foggy, or visually distorted
- Having perceptual alterations
- Experiencing an unreal, unstable, or absent self
- Experiencing emotional or physical numbing
- Feeling of watching a movie of your life

## Coping Skills

Coping skills are what can help us deal with and manage stressful situations as well as ground ourselves to remain in the present. A few ways that can help us manage experiences of dissociation is journaling, practicing visualization, grounding techniques, breathing exercises, ensuring quality sleep, and reducing daily stress.

1. Journaling
  - a. When utilizing journaling as a coping skill, you could utilize a guided journal or preselected questions, or you could freely write about your experiences, emotions, or thoughts each day. While practicing journaling, you'll want to look for patterns or certain experiences that trigger dissociation and learning to avoid or manage those experiences or interactions.
2. Practicing Visualization
  - a. You can practice visualization to cope. Visualization is when you imagine yourself in a place or experience that is safe and calm, which could be your happy place or safe space. This could be imagining yourself at the beach, at home, with a certain set of people, hiking, etc. and you'll want to focus on the sight, smell, sound, and surroundings which can help bring you to a calm and grounded state.
3. Grounding Techniques
  - a. Grounding techniques are practices that anyone can use to help themselves stay grounded in the present moment especially if they're experiencing heightened emotions, dissociation, or flashbacks. A few grounding techniques you could use are:
    - i. Holding a piece of ice and focusing on the feeling.
    - ii. Placing your feet flat on the ground and focusing on them.
    - iii. Counting backwards from 10.
    - iv. Holding an item/object tightly and focusing on how it feels in your hand.
    - v. Focusing on the smells around you.
    - vi. Engaging in rhythmic movements (e.g. tapping your feet, swaying).
4. Breathing Exercises
  - a. Breathing exercises can help with controlling your breathing in order to calm yourself, bring you back to the present moment, and reduce feelings of stress or anxiety. A few breathing exercises you could use are:
    - i. Breathing in for 4 seconds, holding it for 4 seconds, and then breathing out for 4 seconds.
    - ii. Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest, slowly breathe in and out, focusing on the movements of your chest and belly.
    - iii. Placing your hands on the back of your head with your elbows point to the side outward, close your eyes, and breathe in and out slowly.
5. Ensuring Quality Sleep
  - a. In order to reduce dissociation, you want to make sure that you're getting quality sleep each night. To improve your sleep quality, you could develop a bedtime routine, disconnect from electronic devices before bed, creating a comfortable sleeping environment, and ensuring you have a dark area to sleep in.
6. Reducing Daily Stress
  - a. You'll want to reduce your daily stress in order to reduce symptoms of dissociation. You can look at certain patterns, individuals, or experiences that typically increase stress and try to reduce it by setting boundaries, instilling more relaxation practices throughout your day, or practicing time management.

## References

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