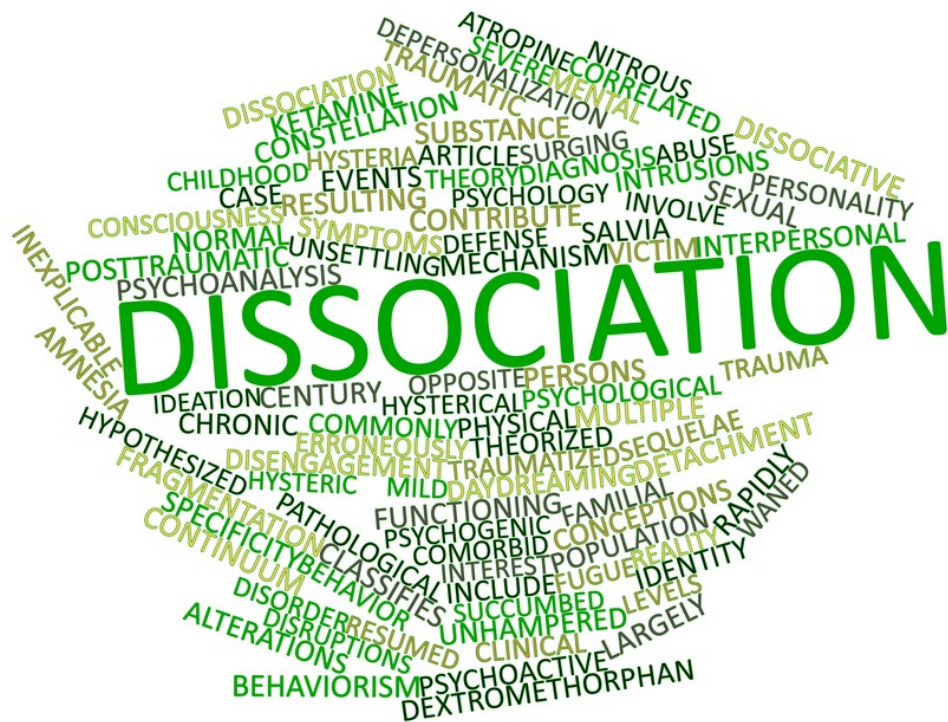




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# Welcome to the Coping with Dissociation Workshop



## **Goals of the Coping with Dissociation Workshop**

To learn about what dissociation is, and the dissociative disorders that may occur because of childhood trauma.

To identify warning signs that of dissociation and what it might feel and look like.

To identify and practice coping skills to help individuals get out of dissociative states or to prevent dissociation from occurring.

This workshop is not a replacement for treatment by a professional, but an opportunity understand dissociation and to review skills already learned or to identify new skills that could potentially be helpful in coping with dissociation.

## **What is Dissociation?**

A disconnection between a person's memories, feelings, behavior, perception, and/or sense of self.

## **Reasons Dissociation May Occur**

During or because of a traumatic event in order to cope with an emotional response.

As a coping skill when there is an emotional or physical trigger or threat.

When going through too much to process in the moment.

## **Signs of Dissociation**

Lightheadedness

Feeling as though you are starting to daze or become spacey (ex. Blurred vision)

Trouble thinking clearly

A sense of being detached from yourself and your emotions

Feeling like people or things look “far away” or distant even though they are nearby

Memory loss or difficulty remembering

List Additional Warning Signs You Have

## **What Dissociation May Look for Feel Like**

Daydreaming or “spacing out”

Eyes glazed over

Lightheadedness

Numbness

Acting differing such as rapid switching of emotions or reactions

## **Types of Dissociation**

### **Depersonalization**

This is when things around you seem unreal. Individuals feel detached from themselves. Other symptoms of depersonalization include feeling as though they might be out of body watching from above or seeing oneself from a distance, that you have become a machine, and feeling numb

### **Derealization**

The surrounding world, such as your environment, the people in it, and objects around you doesn't feel real. Some symptoms including your body, may feel like it's changed in size, and there may be a heightened awareness of your surroundings

## **Dissociative Disorders**

### **Depersonalization/Derealization Disorder**

This disorder is diagnosed when depersonalization and derealization is persistent and significantly impairs social and everyday functioning

### **Dissociative Amnesia**

When a person can't remember important information in their life. Usually this happens unconsciously but a person blocks out certain information associated with a traumatic event, making it hard to remember personal information.

### **Dissociative Fugue**

This is a rare and severe form of amnesia caused by extreme trauma. It involves completely losing their memory of themselves and who they are as a person

## **Dissociative Identity Disorder**

DID used to be called “multiple personality disorder.” This is where two or more personalities (emotional parts), which will control their behavior at different times.

## **Treatment for Dissociation**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) - explores underlying conflict or trauma and unhealthy thought patterns. Teaches coping mechanisms

Eye Movement Desensitizing and Reprocessing (EMDR) - this type of therapy helps minimize stress from previous traumatic experiences with visualization. Therapists use lateral eye movements or other stimulation such as taps or other movements as a way to make you think of either the past, present, or the future memories. When the movements stop, the therapist asks where the client went and what the client thought about. They then talk through the experience and process through the things the client thought of and maybe the trauma that came up. It helps to stop the flow of unwanted memories related to a trauma and to reprocess so a person doesn't become triggered as easily

Dialectical Behavioral therapy (DBT) - this type of therapy helps you learn the skills to control your emotions, stop harmful destructive thoughts.

Creative therapies such as art therapy or music therapy - This therapy allows you to explore and express their thoughts and feelings through creativity. Can be done guided with a therapist or on your own.

Somatic experiencing - this therapy works on relieving the stress within the body that might cause PTSD symptoms such as dissociation. Uses bottom-up technique with the framework focusing on sensory, imagery, behavior, affect, and meaning. Focusing on sensation first and the physiological sensations and stress within the body. Then using guided imagery to talk through what you felt physically and emotionally during the activity. The therapist observes your body language while in therapy. Affect deals with how you display your emotions to the outside world. Meaning has to do with talking out what therapy means to you and your experiences

Group therapy

## **Coping Skills for Dissociation**

Practicing coping skills is not only helpful when you are experiencing distressing emotions and dissociation but always keeping that ultimate safe place to go to in the back of your head and having safe things to do can help with feeling better mentally. Feeling safe, grounded, and visualizing positive things can help you come back to the present and stop the dissociation. The act of visualization means the process of creating a visual image in your mind. This can be guided or on your own. Practice when you are not dissociating so it is easier to do when you are dissociating.

“We are here now, we are safe, and the trauma is over and in the past”

### **Visualization Exercises**

These can be used for when you have anxious thoughts that might cause you to dissociate.

Imagine your thoughts as people. Imagine a window and they are standing behind it. Slowly close the window as you breathe deeply

Visualize yourself in a grounded place. A place that makes you feel connected to today and rooted

Imagine you are wearing safe protective clothing to help you feel relaxed.

Imagine you are giving yourself a big hug

Visualize yourself laying on a white sandy beach, with blue skies and gentle waves. Imagine your body sinking into the sand and feel the warmth of the sand on your feet. As you imagine yourself sitting there, let go of any tension and continue to slowly breathe with the sound of the waves.

### **Grounding Exercises**

The act of grounding means the process of physically and mentally connecting with the world around you — the ground you can feel beneath your feet, the scents you can smell in the air, etc. — which can re-establish a sense of reality. Grounding has to do a lot with the senses to remind ourselves what we are present in the moment.

Place feet firmly on the ground. State time and date. Take slow, deep breaths. State out loud or in your head what you observe around you in the present moment. Remind yourself you are safe.

Touch different textures and/or fabrics.

Do the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, either in your head or speak it out loud.

5 things you can see.

4 things you can touch.

3 things you can hear.

2 things you can smell.

1 thing you can taste.

Smell a soothing fragrance such as a candle or flower or the ground to get you back into the present

Listen to music that soothes you or make a playlist

Splash face or body with cold water

Repeat a calming mantra to yourself either out loud or in your head to remind yourself that you are surviving in the present

Do deep breathing exercises with something in your hand to keep yourself present

Journal

Jump up and down or on the bawls of your feet. Feel your arms and shoulders flop around

Do something goofy. Pat yourself on the head and rub your stomach.

Change scenery. Go to another room or outside if you feel an episode coming or are triggered.

Organize your space, make it your own

If struggling with derealism, name things that you know that are true. Connect with the present. Such as your name, how old you are, where you are in that present moment, if it's day or night. Try looking at yourself in a happy picture and say "I am safe in this photo, state your age, I am safe right now

Find yourself a grounding object such as a stone or shell and pay attention to the details of the object

Bite into something sour or tart

Squeeze a stuffed animal

Pop bubble wrap

Rip up paper

Color, draw or paint

Rub your palms together, clap your hands and wiggle your toes noticing the physical sensation

Keep your eyes open as it's easier to remain connected to the present

Massage your muscles

Do Yoga

Watch your favorite movie

Get a cold drink and feel it as you drink and you can hold the glass to your cheek, feel the temperature on your hands

Stroke your pets, feel their breathing, their furr and how soft they are

### **Deep Breathing Exercises**

Four in, four out simple breathing exercise

Make sure you are sitting or lying comfortably.

Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so.

Breathe through your nose rather than your mouth if that is comfortable for you.

Deliberately slow your breathing down.

Breathe in to a count of 4

Pause for a moment

Breathe out to a count of 4

Pause

Repeat

Make sure that your breaths are *smooth*, *steady*, and *continuous* – not jerky; pay particular attention to your out-breath – make sure it is smooth and steady

Whole body Muscle tensing and relaxing

Take a very deep breath in with your mouth open; fill your lungs up.

Hold your breath.



While holding your breath, tense muscles all over your body as tense as you can – face, fingers, toes, shoulders, stomach, butt, legs etc. – without injuring yourself (if you have a known issue go easy on that part of your body)  
Count 5-10 seconds while holding your breath and keeping all muscles tense.  
Then relax everything, let go of all the tension in your muscles and  
Slowly let your breath out.

#### The Sigh

Breath in.

When you breathe out, open your mouth and exhale the air with the sound of the air releasing, a soft sigh sound.

Relax your shoulders, neck and other muscles and let everything go.

Do 3 or 4 times, or however many times feel right.

#### **Distraction Exercises**

Count backwards from 100 by 7's.

Say the alphabet backwards

Pick a color and look for things of that color and say them out loud

Listen to or watch a comedy

Complete a crossword or some type of puzzle

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