



Rejection sensitivity dysphoria

a quick-reference resource

What is Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD)?

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria is defined as a complex and intense emotional reaction to real or perceived rejection, failure or criticism which stems from a decreased ability to regulate emotional responses.

Those who experience RSD describe it as an extreme or debilitating physical and/or emotional pain. Therefore, it is the intensity of the emotional experience that separates RSD from a general dislike of rejection.

RSD is not an officially recognised diagnosis, but it is still a term used in relation to other recognised conditions.

Characteristics of RSD

- **Challenges with emotional regulation:** Including intensified emotional responses to perceived rejection and criticism and rapid changes in mood in relation to what could be perceived as minor interactions
- **Fear of rejection:** Persistent concern of potential criticism and rejection resulting in ongoing worry/anxiety
- **Low self-efficacy and negative self-image:** Low confidence, feelings of worthlessness and distorted self-image
- **Difficulty handling criticism:** Feedback, even constructive can have a deep emotional impact, leading to decreased wellbeing

RSD

ADHD

The research on RSD is limited but it is believed that RSD can affect anyone and can be observed alongside various neurodivergent conditions. However, you will see the topics of ADHD and RSD to be more commonly intertwined in comparison to other conditions.

This is because the RSD originates from ADHD research, and it has been suggested that those with ADHD experience RSD at a higher rate than the general population.

How to support RSD at work

- **Education and awareness:** Do your research – understanding RSD and the impact it can have is important when supporting someone
- **Active listening:** Take the time to listen to someone's point of view, experiences and feelings even if you don't fully understand or relate to the intensity of emotion
- **Processing time:** Schedule in processing time before and after meetings to build in a safety net for the individual to process their emotions before having to communicate
- **Structure feedback sessions:** Discuss and agree upon a feedback process that works for both you and the individual
- **Schedule in debriefs:** Always offer or schedule in a debrief session following any feedback to allow time for processing before discussion, reflection or implementing support
- **Reassurance:** RSD can lead to a spiral of negative thinking and decreased confidence. Increased reassurance and positive affirmations may be useful to realign this view

RSD

Support strategies

Identify your triggers: Recognising the people, situations or events that trigger RSD can allow you to develop your self-awareness and prepare effectively

Catch patterns of overthinking: When we feel rejected or criticised, it can be easy to ruminate and self-blame, which in turn heightens the emotional response. Recognise and interrupt this this pattern by focusing on the facts.

Journalling: Writing out your thoughts and feelings can support reflection

Acceptance and compassion: Accept the sensations and emotions you feel and practice self-compassion through positive affirmations.

Regulation activities: The intensity of emotions can be hard to break free from. Find some down regulation activities that work for you to bring balance when you're feeling intense emotions e.g., meditation, yoga, reading etc.



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