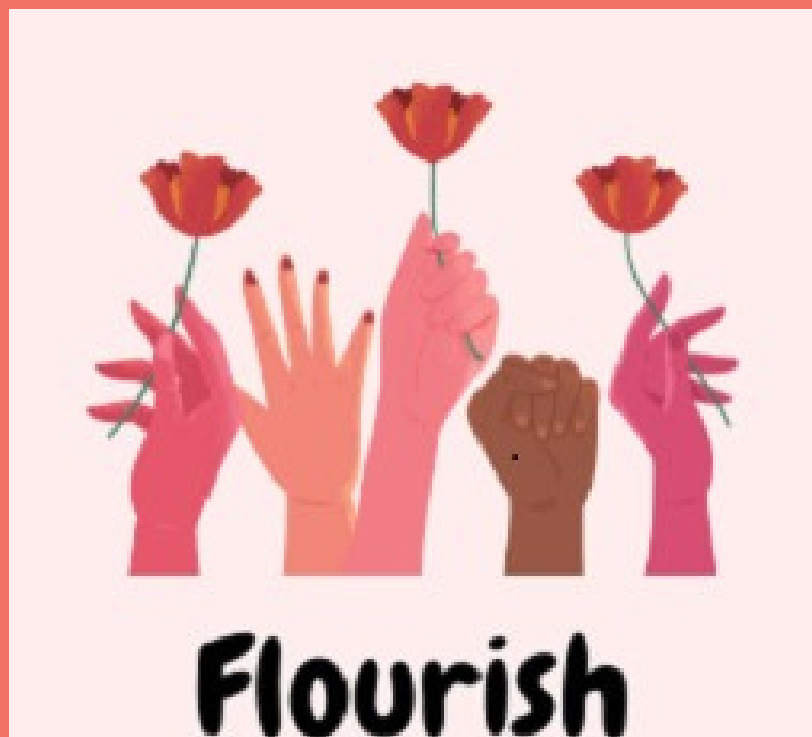


# Rejection Sensitivity and ADHD



# Rejection Sensitivity



# Flourishing Beyond Rejection Sensitivity



## Who has Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD)?

Many individuals with depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, and autism may experience rejection sensitivity dysphoria (RSD), but it appears to be more prevalent among women with ADHD.

The reason why people get RSD has yet to be discovered. William Dodson, a doctor specializing in ADHD, thinks it might be because of differences in the ADHD brain.



However, women with ADHD often feel alone and judged throughout their lives. People say that by age 12, children with ADHD have heard 2,000 more negative comments than kids without it. We don't know exactly how these negative comments affect people with ADHD, but they might be connected to RSD.



# Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria

## What is RSD?

RSD is feeling extra sensitive to the idea of being rejected. This can happen because of many things, like being afraid of failing or making mistakes, feeling disappointed, or getting criticized. It can even happen if you think these things might happen.

## Other important things to know

RSD can be felt as actual pain.  
It can be excruciatingly painful.



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You might have difficulty coping and doing your daily activities when you experience RSD.

It can sometimes take days or weeks to recover from an incident of RSD.

It's hard to regulate your emotions when you have an RSD incident, and you may feel stuck thinking about what happened.

Sometimes, you may even start to get depressed.



# Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria



## My checklist

☐

**When I feel like I've made a mistake**

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☐

**When people criticize me**

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☐

**When I feel like I am being judged**

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☐

**When I feel like someone is reprimanding me**

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☐

**Other**

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# Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria

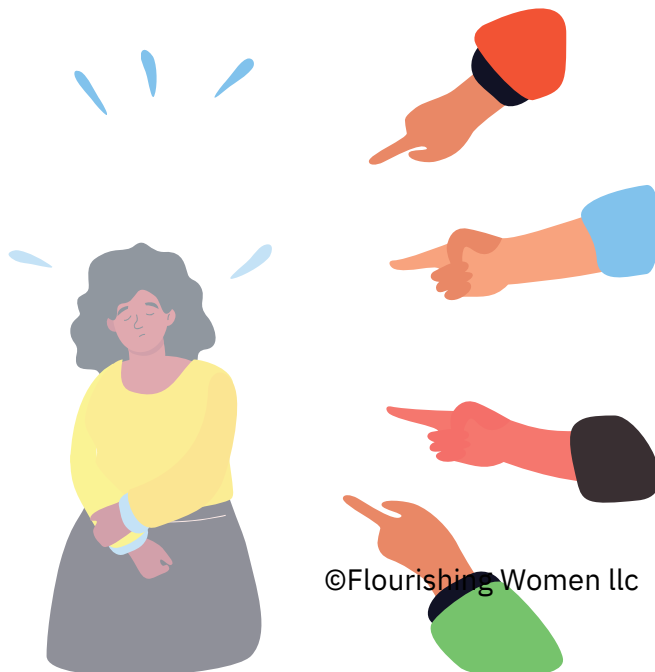
Let's take a look at some of the difficulties RSD might cause you.

## Shame and RSD

Shame is caused by RSD, which makes you feel inadequate and unworthy. Shame is challenging to overcome and leads to hiding. Shame is not the same as guilt, which is a natural feeling when you do something wrong. Shame makes you feel like **YOU** are wrong.

When Adhd women make mistakes, shame, and RSD are often triggered.

However, avoiding mistakes leads to a limited life.  
Making mistakes is essential for learning and growth.



# Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria



## Perfectionism and RSD

Perfectionism may be triggered by Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD).

RSD can lead to people-pleasing behavior and hiding. When someone with RSD experiences shame, they may try to avoid those feelings by working even harder to please others and avoid disappointment. Trying to be perfect and please others is exhausting and difficult to maintain.

## Lashing Out

RSD may cause you to lash out at others as well, leading to more shame and more avoidance.

Masking, hiding, avoidance, and perfectionism can lead to unhappiness and inauthenticity.

Let's look at some ideas that might help you.

There are lots to try, and some might work better for you. Please just do what you think is right.



# Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria



## Things my RSD Makes Me Do My checklist

☐

**I shut down/avoid/can't function after**

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☐

**I lash out/get angry/defend to protect**

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☐

**I am afraid to make mistakes**

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☐

**I avoid trying new things**

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☐

**I am a perfectionist**

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# RSD and Self Care Skills

People are more emotionally regulated when they get enough sleep and maintain a healthy blood sugar level. Also, the less you push yourself beyond what you are comfortable doing, the less likely you will be to have an uncontrollable RSD episode.

Working to care for yourself well will decrease RSD episodes.

## **Ideas for self-care to decrease RSD**

Prune your life of unsupportive people.

Address uninformed people in your life regarding your RSD.

Assess and address toxic or unhealthy work environments.

Establish and maintain regular sleep and eating habits.

Be aware of how your hormonal cycle affects your emotions and plan accordingly.

Connect with supportive people to avoid feeling isolated.



# RSD and Self Care Skills

## A Note on Medications

Medications can help with rejection sensitivity, according to Bill Dodson. Dodson recommends alpha agonists like clonidine or guanfacine.

Women report they are wearing emotional armor while taking these medications and feel more able to manage intense dysregulation. This armor protects them and helps them choose their responses to situations, feeling s a greater sense of self-trust.



# RSD and Self Advocacy Skills



One effective approach to managing rejection sensitivity dysphoria (RSD) is to educate your partner, friends, and family about the condition. By sharing what you're learning and practicing self-care, you can help them understand your experiences and receive therapeutic support. Self-advocacy plays a crucial role in treating yourself with the love, care, and respect you deserve.

## Teaching Loved Ones about RSD

Use the following phrase to help explain RSD:

### Feels Like Pain

"RSD can feel like physical pain in my body, just like it causes you physical pain. I learned that I share this in common with other people who have ADHD and other forms of neurodivergence. Do you remember when you (fill in the blank with an incident of physical pain)? One thing you can do to help me is to remember that your words can cause me physical pain; if you aren't careful with your words, it hurts me, and it can take me a long time to heal."



# RSD and Self Advocacy SKills



More Tips to Share with Your Partner, Friends, or Family:

## **Encourage positive feedback:**

"Please remember to tell me the things I have been doing well."

## **Be aware of facial expressions:**

"Please be conscientious of your facial expression. I learned that I could be really sensitive to facial expressions, which can have a significant impact on me."

## **Use collaborative phrases:**

"When you give me feedback or ask me to do things, are you willing to use collaborative phrases so I don't feel shamed or controlled?" Examples: "Would you be open to...", "Would you be willing to...", "I would love it if you would..."

# RSD and Self Advocacy SKills



## Check-in before initiating conversations:

"If you check first with me to make sure that I am feeling good, regulated, and calm, it can help me avoid the pain of RSD."

Example: "Is this an okay time to discuss X?"

How do you feel about talking about this right now?"

## Validate feelings:

"Will you validate and listen to my feelings? When I have feelings, it can help if you just listen to them and reflect them back to me rather than telling me if they are right or wrong. Reminding me that my thoughts and feelings matter to you is really helpful and will decrease RSD for me, helping me to feel safe. I have had many years where I was taught my thoughts and feelings didn't matter."

### *Self-Advocacy Notes:*

*Mental health professionals sometimes misdiagnose RSD as bipolar disorder or borderline personality disorder in women. It is essential to be aware of this possibility and advocate for yourself to ensure an accurate diagnosis and appropriate support.*

# The Amygdala Hijack and RSD

The amygdala, one of the most primitive parts of our brain, continuously collects data from our five senses and remains on the lookout for dangerous situations where it must act. When the amygdala senses danger, real or imagined, it secretes a series of hormones that signal the fight/flight/freeze response to occur.

The amygdala is likely responsible for RSD. In order to respond with your thinking brain, you need to calm down and recover from this hijack, so breathing, resting, and restoring your body to a calm place is essential before you try to think about what happened.

When RSD hits, good judgment and thinking can go offline.

What helps most is creating a sense of safety for yourself when you have an RSD episode, so your brain gets the signal that you are safe, your amygdala calms down, and your thinking brain can re-engage.

RSD episodes can be quite traumatic. Let's look at some ways to create safety in response to an RSD episode.



# Grounding

Grounding is a way to cope with trauma and heal. It helps you connect with the present moment and can make you feel centered, safe, or distracted. When you ground yourself, you remind yourself that you are in a different situation than the one that caused those feelings.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, triggered, or very distressed, grounding techniques can help you calm down.

## **5,4,3,2,1**

1. Sit down or stand up straight and take a deep breath.
2. Look around and find five things that you can see in your surroundings.

They can be anything, such as a picture on the wall or a plant in the room. Could you name each item out loud?

3. Next, find four things that you can touch. They can be anything within your reach, such as your clothing or the surface of a desk. Touch each item and focus on how it feels against your skin.

4. Now, find three things you can hear. Listen carefully for any sounds around you, such as the hum of a fan or the sound of traffic outside. Name each sound out loud.

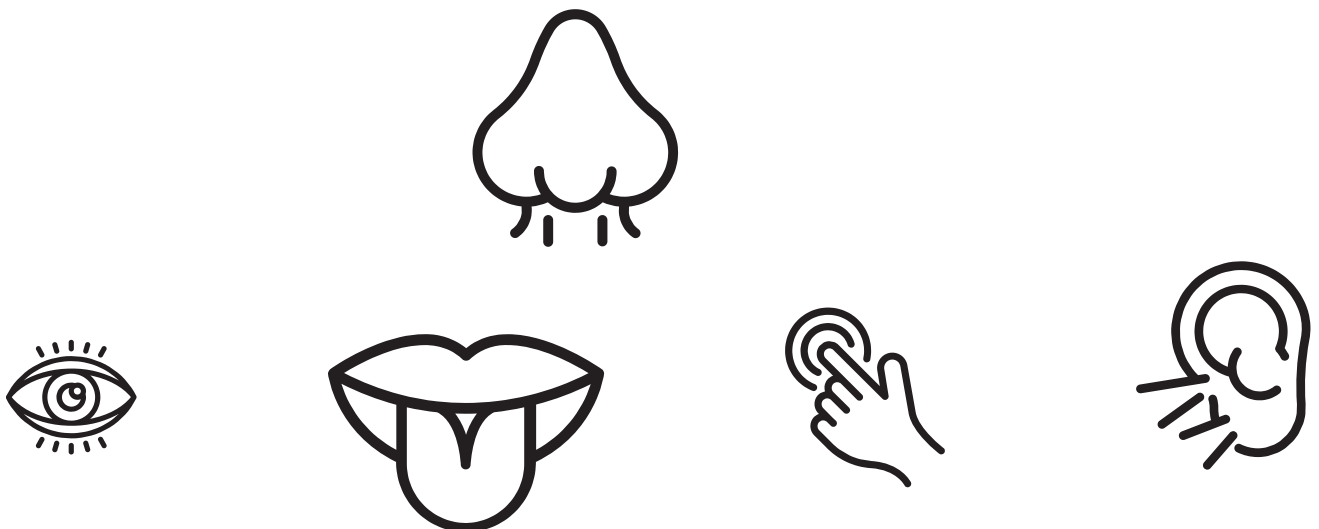
# Grounding

5. Move on to 2 things you can smell. Take a deep breath in and try to detect any smells in the air, such as the scent of a candle or the aroma of food cooking. Focus on each smell and try to identify it by naming it.

6. Finally, find one thing you can taste. This can be something you are currently eating or drinking, or you can focus on the taste in your mouth. Pay attention to the flavor and texture of the item.

7. Repeat the exercise as often as needed until you feel more connected to your surroundings and less overwhelmed by your thoughts or emotions.

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# Activate Your Parasympathetic Nervous System

Exposing your body to acute cold conditions, such as taking a cold shower or splashing cold water on your face ,increases vagus nerve stimulation. While your body adjusts to the cold, sympathetic activity declines,and parasympathetic activity increases.

You can also go for a walk or exercise and it may have a similar effect.

## Shift Your Focus

Engage in an interesting or exciting activity.

William Dodson suggests that getting involved in something you enjoy can help reduce episodes of Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD).



# Imagery for Safety

Imagery is a powerful tool for calming down a scared or traumatized mind because it taps into the brain's ability to visualize and create vivid mental scenes. These scenes can provide a sense of comfort, relaxation, and safety, helping to counteract the feelings of fear or distress associated with RSD. When dealing with ADHD and RSD, I've had success using imagery exercises to help individuals access their inner resources and foster a sense of calm.

Regularly using imagery to create a safe place or a safe memory can have a profound impact on overall well-being. By consistently revisiting these comforting mental scenes, you can train your mind to more easily access feelings of safety and relaxation, even in the midst of challenging situations. This practice not only helps in coping with immediate stressors but also contributes to long-term emotional resilience and self-regulation.



# Imagery for Safety

## Safe Place Imagery

Find a comfortable and quiet place to sit or lie down.

Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose, hold it for a few seconds, and then slowly exhale through your mouth.

Imagine yourself in a place or with someone you love. It could be a memory or a fantasy.

Visualize the details of the scene. What colors do you see? What shapes and textures surround you?

Pay attention to the sounds and smells around you. Are there any particular scents or noises that stand out to you?

As you relax, try to incorporate more details into your imagination. Are you sitting or standing? What are you wearing? Is there a breeze, or is it still?

Allow yourself to be fully immersed in this scene and feel the emotions that come with it. Are you happy, content, or relaxed?

Take your time and enjoy the experience. Stay in this imagined scene for as long as you like, until you feel more relaxed and present in the moment.

When you are ready, take a deep breath and slowly open your eyes.

# Imagery for Safety

## Happy Memories



- Find a collection of photographs that remind you of happy memories. This could be physical photo albums or digital ones on your phone or computer.
- Choose one photograph that resonates with you and take a few moments to observe every detail of the photo. Pay attention to the colors, the expressions on people's faces, the setting, and anything else that stands out to you.
- Allow yourself to relive the emotions and sensations associated with that moment. Remember how you felt, what you were thinking, and how the experience made you feel.
- Think about the people you were with and how they made you feel. Remember the sounds you heard and the smells in the air. Allow yourself to fully immerse in the happy memory.
- Stay with this memory and feeling for as long as you like, savoring the positive emotions it brings up for you.

When you're ready, move on to another photograph and repeat the process.

# Using Self Talk

Self-talk is a powerful tool that can help you regulate your emotions and calm yourself down in difficult situations. It involves using language to communicate with yourself in a way that is kind, supportive, and reassuring. By using self-talk, you can help to reduce feelings of anxiety, fear, and stress, and promote feelings of calm, safety, and well-being.

Try generating a statement ahead of time that helps with safety and posting it somewhere to use when you have an episode.

1. Identify the situation that is causing you distress. This could be anything from a difficult conversation with a friend or family member, to a stressful work meeting, to a memory of a mistake

2. Use calming words or a mantra to remind yourself that you are okay and safe. The focus here is only on safety and calming yourself, not making your feelings go away. For example, you might say to yourself, "This hurts, and I am scared but I'm ok," or "I am safe even though this feels awful."

3. Speak kind statements to yourself about your experience, as if you were talking to a friend or loved one. For example, you might say something like,

"It's okay to feel upset about this, but you're doing the best you can."

4. Repeat your self-talk as often as necessary to help you feel more calm and centered. You might find it helpful to write down your self-talk and read it

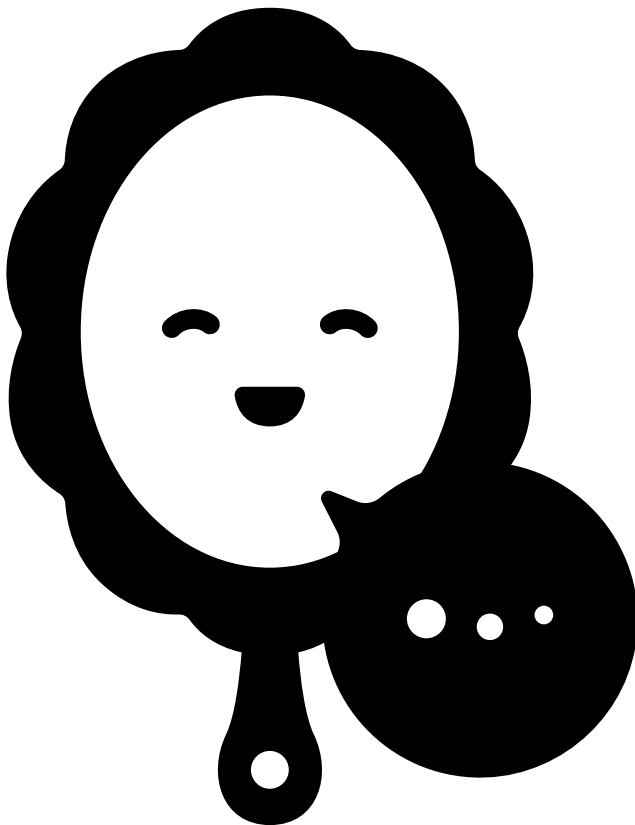
back to yourself whenever you're feeling overwhelmed or anxious.

# Using Self Talk

Remember, self-talk is a skill that takes practice to develop. Be patient with yourself as you learn to use it. With time and practice, you can learn to use self-talk as a powerful tool for coping with life's challenges.

Externalizing language is especially helpful for women with ADHD because it can get jumbled up inside of your head.

Bonus if you can ask yourself what you might need to feel better. ·Do you need a cup of tea? A blanket? A hug? A rest?



# Using Distraction

You can do these activities to distract yourself when you begin ruminating and need to pull yourself out of your head. You can do these until you feel less "in your head" or less focused on your thoughts.

1. Find all objects in your environment that fit a particular characteristic, such as all objects that are green or square. Continue doing this exercise until you feel more connected to your surroundings.
2. Count up and down again, as high as you need to go. For example, count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, then 4, 3, 2, 1, until you feel more connected to your surroundings.
3. You can also repeat the words to a song, quote, poem, or prayer that is meaningful to you. You can even read or write it out.
4. Think about things you look forward to or are curious about in the near future.
5. Another option is to play category or concentration games on your phone.
6. Try singing a song you know well in your head over and over again until you feel less "in your head" or less focused on your thoughts.



# Self Awareness After an Episode

After you have recovered from an episode of RSD and gained some distance, you can engage in some reflection. If it feels helpful, ask yourself questions about the incident.

Here are some suggestions to provide insight:

Can you discuss what happened with someone you trust to get feedback about it?

If the RSD episode was related to someone else and you've determined that someone has judged you, ask yourself if that person's opinion truly matters.

If this episode was related to someone else, consider evaluating the people you spend time with. If someone consistently criticizes, judges, or treats you poorly, they may not deserve a place in your life.

If this episode involved someone you love and trust, consider revisiting your self-advocacy notes and sharing them with that person.





# Self-Awareness After an Episode

## Importance of Feedback and Making Mistakes

In upcoming sessions, we will discuss the importance of making mistakes and adopting a growth mindset, crucial to leading a fulfilling life.

RSD can make it hard to function when mistakes are part of the learning process. If RSD prevents you from accepting feedback, such as at work, try saying, "I am working on this." This phrase can save you from potential embarrassment. As soon as you feel RSD being triggered, say this to yourself, then say it out loud and nod. This is okay to do.



## 4-7-8 Breathing

478 breathing is a simple yet effective breathing technique that can help reduce stress and anxiety. It involves taking a deep breath in for a count of 4, holding the breath for a count of 7, and then exhaling slowly for a count of 8. This technique can be done anywhere and anytime you need to use it.



What technique do you plan to employ?

It's essential to recognize that Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) is not your fault. For women with ADHD, this sensitivity can often be a result of accumulated stigma and criticism experienced over time.

Cultivating a sense of safety and self-compassion is vital. Equally important is being patient with your own emotional responses.



