

# Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria

## 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 is not known for sure. 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, whether it really happened or you just thought about it or imagined it.

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

## The Old Skills and RSD

Our group aims to replace the old coping skills, such as hiding, self-criticism, perfectionism, and silencing oneself, with more useful ones. It is important to note that RSD reinforces these protective mechanisms developed in childhood.

## Shame and RSD

Shame is caused by RSD, which makes you feel inadequate and unworthy. Shame is tough 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. Women often avoid trying and making mistakes because it's so painful.

However, avoiding mistakes leads to a limited life.

Making mistakes is essential for learning and growth. We'll discuss this more in a later session.

# Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria



PERFECT

## 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. Our framework can provide new ways to cope with RSD. Let's look at some ideas.

There are lots to try, and some might not work for you. Just do what feels right.



# RSD and Self Care Skills

Practicing self-care can help reduce RSD episodes. For instance, people are more emotionally stable 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 tip from challenge into overwhelm.

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 (see last section)
- Assess and address toxic or unhealthy work environments
- Practice staying in your regulated stress zones through self-awareness and necessary self accommodations
- 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
- Find systems to manage your medications when possible

# 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 and 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 way to manage rsd is to educate your partner, friends, and family about it. By sharing what you're learning and taking care of yourself, you can teach those close to you and receive therapeutic and helpful support. Self-advocacy is a great way to start treating yourself with the love, care, and respect you deserve.

Here is a phrase to begin with :

*"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. "*

More tips to share with your partner friends or family :

- Please remember to tell me the things I have been doing well.
- Please be conscientious of what your facial expression is. I learned that I could be really sensitive to facial expressions, which can have a big impact on me.



# RSD and Self Advocacy Skills

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?

Here are some examples.

- Would you be open to...
- Would you be willing to....
- I would love it if you would....



Will you be careful of the times you approach me with concerns?

*If you check first with me to make sure that I am feeling good, regulated, and calm it can help me from feeling that pain.*

*Heres how to check*

*"Is this an okay time to discuss X? How do you feel about talking about this right now?"*

*Will you validate and listen to my feelings?*

*When I have feelings, it can help if you just listen for them and reflect them back to me rather than telling me if they are right or wrong.*

Reminding me 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.

# The Amygdala Hijack and RSD

## The amygdala hijack and rsd

The amygdala one of the most primitive parts of our brain, continuously collecting data from our five senses and 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 you are safe, your amygdala calms down, and your thinking brain can reengage.

I see rsd episodes as 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 5 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. Name each item out loud.
3. Next, find 4 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 3 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.

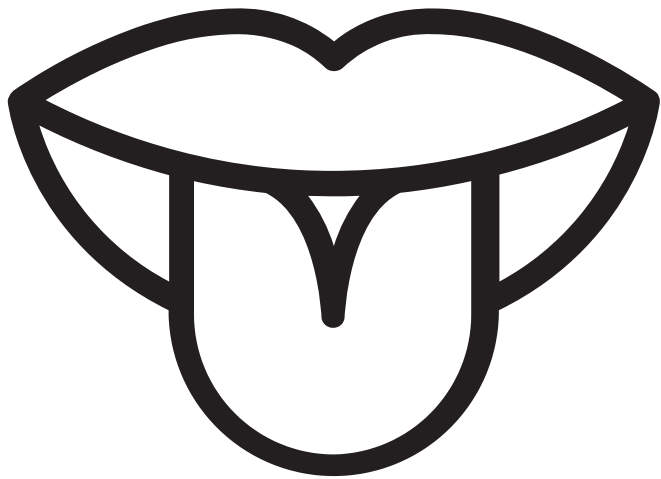
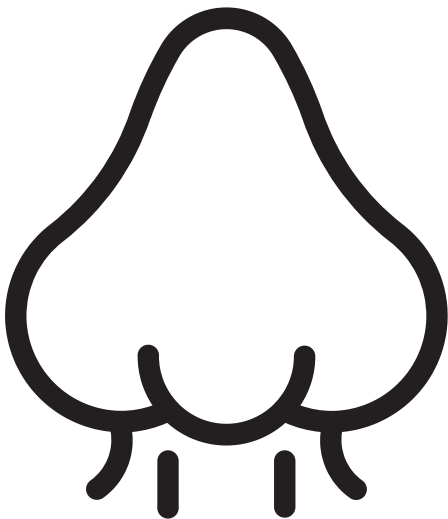


# Grounding

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

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



# 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.

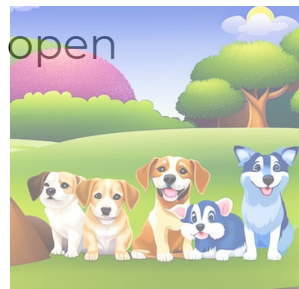
## Shift Your Focus

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).

# Using Imagery for Safety

## Safe Place

- 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.



# Using 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."

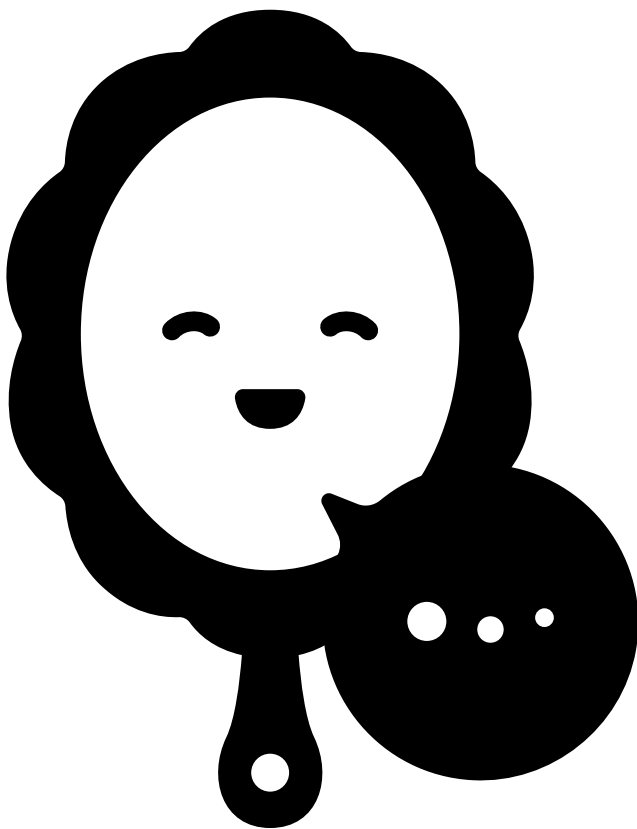
3. Speak kind statements to yourself about your experience, as if you were talking to a friend or loved one. For example, you might say something like, "It's okay to feel upset about this, but you're doing the best you can."

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.

- 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?



# 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 certain 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 you have some distance, you can do some processing. Ask yourself some questions if it feels helpful about the incident. Here are some suggestions to give you some insight.

Can you process 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 matters.

If this episode was related to someone else, consider who you spend time with. If someone is criticizing, judging, or treating you poorly regularly, they may not deserve a place in your life.

If this episode was with someone you love and trust, consider returning to self-advocacy notes and sharing with them.



# 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.



# 478 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.

## Step 1: Understanding the Technique

Learn about the 478 breathing technique by watching a video tutorial or reading an article that explains how to do it. Here's an example video tutorial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz4G31LGyog>





# Group Exercise for RSD

**Objective:** To develop an ultimate compassionate image that represents pure compassion, care, and kindness towards yourself.

1. Start by closing your eyes and taking deep breaths, slowing down your breathing, and relaxing.

2. Think of compassion, notice what images, thoughts, or feelings arise in you. Allow whatever is there to be there, or allow things to come and go as they please.

3. Allow an image to arise that represents compassion for you. Take your time to develop an image that symbolizes all the things that go with compassion. If nothing comes immediately, that's okay, just take your time and see what emerges, no matter how strange it may seem.

4. Develop an image that holds warm feelings towards you, conveys a sense of understanding for you, for your struggles and your feelings, shows kindness, care, and concern for your well-being, and is strong and wise as it supports you.



## Group Exercise for RSD

5. Notice if the image is of a person or not, something real or imagined, an animal, some other being, or an aspect of nature. Is it young or old? Male or female? What colors or light are associated with it?

6. Allow yourself to fully immerse in the image and notice how it makes you feel. What physical sensations in your body go with these feelings? What facial expression does the image display towards you? What body posture or stature does it convey towards you? How does it sound or communicate with you? What things does it say to you? What tone does it use? What does it do to help or comfort you?

7. Spend a few minutes just appreciating this image of ultimate compassion. Pay particular attention to the compassionate feelings this image generates. See if you can allow these feelings to take over, to grow inside you, almost feeling your whole body fill with compassion.



## Group Exercise for RSD

8. When you feel ready, you can let go of the image and open your eyes.

9. Have a go at describing your ultimate compassionate image in words and/or pictures on paper.

10. Share your experience and the image you created with the group.

Why this works

Research shows that imagery can be very powerful in triggering emotions. Our brain is not very good at distinguishing an image from reality, so it will often process and respond to an image, as if it is something occurring for real. Compassion-focused imagery (CFI) is an emotion-regulation technique involving visualization of a person, animal or object offering one compassion, to generate feelings of safeness. It is proven to increase self-compassion and reduce negative affect



# Group Exercise for RSD

How to use it moving forward

1. Choose the compassionate image that triggers feelings of compassion within you, whether it's imagining giving compassion to someone or creating your ultimate compassionate image.
2. Practice bringing this image to mind regularly ,daily ,and when you are relatively calm.
3. Strengthen the image by using it to spark compassionate feelings within you.
4. Use the image during tough times when you are experiencing emotional pain.
5. Remember to start your imagery practice with a few rounds of slow breathingto get you in the mood for compassion.



---

---