



DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS

DEPERSONALISATION/DEREALISATION DISORDER

What it is:

Depersonalisation/derealisation disorder is characterised by recurring episodes of depersonalisation, derealisation, or both. Episodes of depersonalisation are characterised by feelings of unreality or detachment from your whole self or from aspects of the self. The individual may feel that they are observing themselves from outside of their own body, or they may feel detached from their own thoughts, emotions or actions. However despite these symptoms, the individual never loses complete touch with reality, and does not become delusional or psychotic.

Episodes of derealisation are characterised by feelings of unreality, detachment or unfamiliarity with the world, which may include individuals, inanimate objects, or surroundings. The individual may feel like they are in a dream, or they may feel there is a veil or some sort of barrier between them and the rest of the world. Surroundings may be experienced as being artificial or lifeless. There may also be visual or auditory distortions such as blurriness, altered distance or size of objects, or voices or sounds may be perceived as either muted or louder.

Individuals with this disorder often have difficulty describing their symptoms, and may even fear that they are “losing their minds.” A commonly associated symptom of the disorder is a subjectively altered sense of time, for example feeling that time is going slower or faster than normal. The individual may also have difficulty clearly remembering past memories, and may even feel that these memories do not belong to them.

Common symptoms:

1. Recurring experiences of depersonalisation, derealisation, or both.
2. Depersonalisation – Experiences of unreality, detachment or being an outside observer to your thoughts, experiences or actions. The individual may feel that they are observing themselves or events from outside of their body.
3. Derealisation – Experiences of unreality, or detachment with regards to your surroundings and the world around you. The individual may feel

they are in a dream, or their surroundings may appear foggy or have visual or auditory distortions.



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Causes:

There are a number of factors that could contribute to the development of depersonalisation/derealisation disorder. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse have all been associated with the disorder. As have other stressors such as witnessing domestic violence, the unexpected death of a loved one, severe stress, depression, or drug abuse. Certain substances, such as tetrahydrocannabinol, hallucinogens, ecstasy and marijuana have been known to cause symptoms associated with the disorder.

Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*