



DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS

DISSOCIATIVE AMNESIA

What it is:

Dissociative amnesia is characterised by an inability to remember important personal information that should be successfully be stored in an individual's memory and ordinarily would be readily remembered. The events that have been forgotten are often of a traumatic or stressful nature. There are different variants of dissociative amnesia. Localised amnesia is the failure to recall events which took place during a specific period of time, and it is the more common form of dissociative amnesia. Localised amnesia may be broader than amnesia for a single traumatic event, and may cover for example months or years associated with childhood abuse.

In selective amnesia the individual may remember certain events that took place during a specific period of time, but not all. So the individual may remember part of a traumatic experience, but not all of it. Generalised amnesia is where an individual loses all memories of their life history, and it is very rare. Individuals with generalised amnesia may forget their personal identity, or they may lose previous knowledge about the world or skills they possessed. Generalised amnesia may be more common under war veterans, sexual abuse or assault victims, or individuals experiencing extreme emotional stress.

Common symptoms:

1. An inability to remember important personal information or events that would ordinarily be easily remembered. Often a traumatic or stressful event
2. This can take the form of localised or selective amnesia, in which an individual is unable to remember events that took place in a specific time period, or can remember some of the events but not all
3. This can take the form of generalised amnesia in which an individual forgets their life history or identity
4. The amnesia cannot be attributed to the effects of a substance or medication that was taken, or to a neurological or other medical condition



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Causes:

One or more traumatic experiences such as war, childhood abuse or a natural disaster are common triggers for dissociative amnesia. Higher rates of adverse childhood experiences, interpersonal violence and the increased severity, frequency and violence of the trauma also increases the risk of the disorder. Removal from the traumatic circumstances which contributed to the development of the dissociative amnesia may lead to a rapid return of memory.

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.*