



## DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS

### DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER

#### What it is:

Dissociative identity disorder, also known as multiple personality disorder, is characterised by a disruption of identity with two or more personality states being present in the same individual. In some cultures this may be perceived as possession by a supernatural spirit or being. The disruption in identity may be strongly exhibited and clearly visible to others, or it may be minor and difficult to discern. This disruption of identity involves a clear break in the individual's sense of self, and goes together with changes in behaviour, memory, perception and sensory-motor functioning.

The individual may feel that they have no control over their own actions or thoughts, as if there is a secondary person or entity who is speaking or performing actions through them. Their personal preferences regarding food, activities and how they dress may suddenly change and then shift back. The individual may also report that their body feels different, like it is "not mine" or "not under my control."

Dissociative amnesia is common in individuals with dissociative identity disorder. Dissociative amnesia can manifest as gaps in memory of personal life events, such as memories of childhood or of getting married, lapses in dependable behaviour, such as how to drive or read, and discovery of everyday tasks the individual does not recall performing, such as finding objects purchased but having no recollection of buying them.

#### Common symptoms:

1. Disruption of identity with two or more distinct personality states. The disruption in identity involves a clear break in sense of self and changes in behaviour, memory, perception and/or sensory-motor functioning. This can involve talking, dressing, moving, or behaving in a way that is unnatural or contrary to the individual's typical personality, and then reverting back to "typical" behaviour
2. Recurring gaps in memory. This can relate to everyday events, important personal events or traumatic life events

3. Individuals with this disorder will often not be aware of, or conceal, disruptions in consciousness, amnesia or other dissociative symptoms



**SA Federation for  
Mental Health**

### **Causes:**

Interpersonal physical and sexual abuse have been associated with an increased risk for developing dissociative identity disorder. Childhood neglect and abuse, as well as war, childhood prostitution, and childhood medical and surgical procedures have all been indicated as risk factors. Ongoing abuse, severe trauma later on in life, as well as severe mental illness are also associated with a poorer prognosis.

**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.*