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National Alliance on Mental Illness

Serving the New Jersey Capital Area

UNDERSTANDING
REJECTION
SENSITIVE
DYSPHORIA



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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is a guide to help those struggling with Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) identify and overcome the challenges that come with it. It also serves as a guide to help loved ones that have RSD.

INCLUDED IN THIS TOOLKIT:

- Signs of RSD
- What RSD can look like and what triggers it
- Self-help strategies and ways to help others struggling with RSD



WHAT IS REJECTION SENSITIVE DYSPHORIA?



Rejection sensitive dysphoria (RSD) is an emotional condition where a person experiences an extreme emotional response and pain to either real or perceived criticism or rejection.

It is most commonly found in people with ADHD, but can also be present in autism, social anxiety, trauma, and more.

WHAT CAN IT LOOK LIKE?

Sudden intense depression, anxiety, overwhelm, or pain

Challenges in relationships due to self-sabotage through irrational jealousy or fears

Conflict avoidance, excessive people-pleasing, and ignoring own needs or desires

Avoidance of social interactions due to fear of rejection, criticism, or judgment.

Unhealthy methods of coping with pain such as self-harm, self-sabotage, or suicidal ideation

Difficulty regulating emotions

WHAT CAUSES RSD?

Neurodivergent individuals, such as those with ADHD and autism, commonly struggle with emotional dysregulation. Emotional dysregulation is when a person experiences an emotion so intensely that it takes over and they cannot change their emotional state.

Those that have faced more rejection early on in life are likelier to experience greater anxiety around real or perceived rejection and criticism



RSD TRIGGERS

1. NEUTRAL OR NONSPECIFIC RESPONSES AND REACTIONS

*Short or abrupt responses (such as “ok,” “fine,” “never mind,” etc.) can leave room for those with RSD to misinterpret how others are actually feeling and may cause them to assume others are upset with them.

2. OVERTHINKING OR MISINTERPRETING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

3. REMINDERS OF PAST REJECTION

4. REAL, PERCEIVED, OR ANTICIPATED REJECTION OR CRITICISM

5. ABRUPT CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR FROM LOVED ONES

*Sudden changes in behavior can cause those with RSD to assume that they did something wrong that caused this abrupt change.

6. REAL OR PERCEIVED FAILURE OF A TASK

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WITH RSD

Communicate and
express yourself
clearly and explicitly

Be consistent with
how you act around
them

Provide additional
reassurance

When giving criticism,
say something positive
first and keep criticism
constructive

Do not dismiss or
minimize their
feelings

Remind them they are
loved

COPING STRATEGIES

1. PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

*Being self-aware of emotions, both positive and negative and accepting the good with the bad with no judgement. Self-judgement of negative emotions can amplify them, making them harder to manage

2. COGNITIVE REFRAMING

*Encourages healthier thoughts and helps manage negative emotions.

- I. **IDENTIFY** THE NEGATIVE THOUGHT
- II. **RE-EVALUATE** THE CIRCUMSTANCES
- III. **PRACTICE** POSITIVE/FLEXIBLE INTERPRETATIONS

3. CONNECT WITH OTHERS

*Talk with someone you trust about your concerns and feelings, and seek out support groups you can share your experiences with.



REMINDERS

**Nobody is
perfect**

**It takes much more
than your mistakes for
other people to hate
you**

**Others are more
forgiving to you than
you are to yourself**

**It is impossible to
know what others are
thinking**

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RESOURCES

SUICIDE AND CRISIS HOTLINE
CALL 988

24/7 CRISIS COUNSELORS
TEXT "NAMI" TO 741741

NAMI MERCER HELPLINE
CALL (609)799-8994 X 17

NAMI HELPLINE
CALL 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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I am a senior at The College of New Jersey, majoring in Public Health. As I have progressed through my education, it has helped me make discoveries about my own mental health and how my mind works. While on my own pathway to healing and learning more about myself, I hope to also help others on their own mental health journeys and guide them on a path of self-forgiveness and understanding.