

Dissociative Identity Disorder (D.I.D)



Dissociative Identity Disorder (D.I.D.) Multiple Personality Disorder

Many survivors live with DID, but information about the condition is often shadowed by stereotypes and misinformation. This article aims not only to give clear information about DID to people who live with the condition, but also to people who work with and support them and to raise awareness and accurate information.

What is Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID)?

Someone with DID experiences shifts of identity as separate personalities. Each identity may take control of behaviour and thoughts at different times. Each has a distinctive pattern of thinking and relating to the world. Severe amnesia can mean that one identity may have no awareness of what happens when another identity is in control. DID is generally considered a “disorder” rather than a mental illness because it is not caused by abnormal brain chemistry, but rather a normal brain responding to the abnormal experience of overwhelming trauma.

People fragment their personality in an effort to find safety and escape trauma. Dissociation of this kind begins with a person telling herself, “I am not here; this is not happening to me; I am not in this body”. It is important to remember that a person with DID is likely to be highly intelligent, resourceful and creative. These same attributes will be of help if that person wishes to address the discord between identities. “I watch a body that looks like me, doing things I’m ashamed of. I can’t will myself back into that body. I can’t control its movements, its thoughts, its feelings. I can only watch and feel the shame and fear. It’s alarming to see the newspaper date, five days ahead of the date I know it to be. It’s frightening to “wake” with the razor in my hand, my arms bleeding and yet know I could never cut myself.”

Survivor of DID

Some of the effects of dissociative disorder may include:

- gaps in memory
- finding yourself in a strange place without knowing how you got there
- out-of-body experiences
- loss of feeling in parts of your body
- distorted views of your body
- inability to recognise your image in a mirror
- a sense of detachment from your emotions
- internal voices and dialogue
- feeling that a customary environment is unfamiliar

- a sense that what is happening is unreal
- forgetting a learned talent or skill
- a sense that people you know are strangers
- a perception of objects changing shape, colour or size
- feeling you don't know who you are
- acting like different people, including child-like behaviour
- being unsure of the boundaries between yourself and others
- feeling like a stranger to yourself
- feeling like there are different people inside you
- referring to yourself as 'we'
- being told by others that you have behaved out of character
- finding items in your possession that you don't remember buying or receiving
- writing in different handwriting

Recovery

The aim of treatment and self-help is to bring about increased connection between feelings, thoughts, perceptions and memories, and to foster a sense of empowerment. This should create a greater sense of wholeness and internal order, and less disruption in work, social and home life. Talking treatments are an important part of effective treatment, along with supportive and creative community mental health services, support in a crisis, various self-help techniques and support groups. Friends and family can play a part. The problems for 'multiples' start mostly when they are out of that abusive situation where it was necessary to use DID. Now the different 'alters' don't have their "jobs" anymore and will start looking for other jobs. It is most of the time then when the host finds herself different.

Diagnosis

If you think you may have a dissociative disorder, it's essential to see your GP, unless you are already a patient of the specialist mental health services. Ask your GP, care coordinator or psychiatrist to refer you to a professional who is aware of dissociation for a full diagnostic assessment.

Resources

Positive Outcomes for Dissociative Survivors: <http://www.pods-online.org.uk/>

International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation - www.isst-d.org

First Person Plural, a membership association open to dissociative survivors, their friends, family and professional allies - www.firstpersonplural.org.uk

The Pottergate Centre for Trauma and Disassociation - www.dissociation.co.uk