

# Recognizing Signs of Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)

*Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria* (RSD) is a common co-occurring experience for Autistic people that describes the intense emotional pain felt when they perceive they have been rejected or criticized.

## Emotional Signs

- Rejection can trigger a big emotional response with a sudden outburst or sudden emotional withdrawal or shutdown.
- Emotions are felt at a very intense level as if the 'volume' is on high following rejection.
- May shift from contentment to extreme anger, rage or despair within moments of rejection.
- Can take a long time to recover from the acute emotional response caused by rejection.
- Emotional response is disproportionate to the real or perceived rejection.
- Masking may lead to a delay in emotional response so that emotional loss of control can occur in private. This takes tremendous effort and energy.
- Difficulty interacting with those who are not perceived as trusted and safe due to fear of rejection, and the emotions that may be triggered.



## Cognitive Signs

- May ruminate or fixate over the rejection for a long period of time—weeks, months, or years.
- May replay the rejection over and over in their mind, looking for clues or reasons for the rejection.
- Always thinking of how to 'fix' the situation; must make sense of the rejection in order to move on.
- Heightened emotional responses can mean cognitive functions are impaired as the 'emotional brain' or limbic system takes over; motivation, time management, planning, prioritizing and organization can be affected.
- Inflexible thinking can result in assuming that if someone makes a negative comment, they want nothing to do with you again.
- Catastrophic thinking may morph into believing a minor work error will lead to termination, inability to find work again, and homelessness.
- Assumptions that people disapprove of and judge you in a negative way.



## Behavioural Signs

- Will avoid new social opportunities or trying new things for fear of failure or being rejected; risk-averse to avoid criticism and judgment.
- May lash out without warning when rejection is experienced; the change in disposition is sudden like a flipped switch
- May become a people-pleaser to avoid rejection; will take on too much even at the expense of one's wellbeing—not for approval, but to avoid rejection.
- May engage in fawning in order to make others happy and to prevent interpersonal conflict; will agree with opinions that are opposite to their own in hopes of avoiding rejection.
- May apologize frequently even when it is not necessary in hopes of staying in people's good graces.
- Will mask their true feelings and authentic self to avoid rejection and negative judgements.



## Ways to help

RSD may feel overwhelming, but knowledge is power. Understanding your emotional responses can help you find your way forward. There are multiple support and treatment options you may choose to explore.

Neurodiversity-affirming therapy, non-judgmental loved ones, and educators or colleagues who validate you can all make a difference. With awareness, support, and compassion—for yourself and from others—things can get better.



**For more information on RSD,  
[click here](#) or scan the QR Code**

