

## Trauma Chat Episode 6

Disclaimer: This is a verbatim transcript which may contain spelling errors.

[00:00:00] **Laura Reagan:** [00:00:00] Trauma Chat episode 6.

[00:00:04] Hi welcome back. This is Laura Reagan, your host. And today we're going to talk about dissociation. I'm going to talk about dissociation, briefly. I really want this to be a shorter episode because I said that they were going to be bite size and some of them are going longer than I wanted them to.

[00:00:25] So what I'm going to do is I'm going to tell you about dissociation, and then I'm going to tell you where you can learn a whole bunch more about dissociation if you want to. Dissociation is something that is common in trauma. I have mentioned it a couple of times already, and you heard me talk about it a little bit last week, when we were talking about the DSM-5 definition of post-traumatic stress disorder, or should I say the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. Two things that I mentioned in episode five, [00:01:00] as part of what's in the DSM, talking about dissociation, are depersonalization, and derealization, and I'll just read those again from the DSM-5, which is the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association. And it's used in the U.S to diagnose mental health disorders and for insurance to pay for that treatment. So depersonalization is the persistent or recurrent experience of feeling detached from, and as if one were an outside observer of one's mental processes or body, for example, feeling as though you were in a dream, feeling a sense of unreality of self or body, or of time moving slowly. And derealization is [00:02:00] persistent or recurrent experiences of unreality of surroundings.

[00:02:03] For example, the world around the individual is experienced as unreal, dreamlike, distant, or distorted. And this is not due to the effects of a substance. Although I will say that, I think sometimes this happens to people when they use alcohol or other substances that another part of them may kind of come forward in their usual self goes in the background.

[00:02:32] And if you've ever heard someone say, "he's a different person when he drinks." Or "I feel like I don't even know you." Those are some examples of sort of our normal self sort of receding into the background and a different part of us coming forward. And dissociation is on a continuum. Um, dissociation is on a spectrum.

[00:02:55] So, at one end of the spectrum is being [00:03:00] preoccupied and at the other end of the spectrum is having another you that dresses differently, acts differently, speaks differently and has a different name that you don't even know is there. In between, there are many shades of dissociation and the way it shows up with us, as I've mentioned in several previous episodes to dissociation is a common reaction to trauma.

[00:03:25] When we can't take in what's happening in, the experience overwhelms our capacity to cope. And most experiences of childhood trauma are like that, we detach from what's happening. It's a way to survive the experience and live through the overwhelming emotions so that when the experience passes, you can then process it and get back to feeling

like your normal self, but in traumatic situations, it's very common that we aren't [00:04:00] able to process it.

[00:04:01] Especially again in childhood, if there's not a safe adult who is attuned to our feelings and understands how to comfort us. So, if the parent is traumatized, which is common because trauma is so common for all of us. If the parent is traumatized, they may not have the ability to see and comfort the child in that experience because they may be having their own trauma reaction when that traumatic event is going on.

[00:04:38] In terms of dissociation, I said, the spectrum goes from being preoccupied to having a completely different identity that you don't even know exists. And when I'm talking about dissociation, I'm not talking about dissociative identity disorder, exclusively. That is one way that dissociation can show up. [00:05:00] But all of us dissociate to some degree at times, for example, getting lost in something you're watching on TV, getting absorbed in work, and not realizing that hours have gone by.

[00:05:14] When you're driving on the highway and you miss your exit and you don't even realize it until maybe you pass two or three more exits and then you're like, "where am I? This doesn't look familiar," and you look around and you realize, "oh my gosh, my exit was five minutes back down the road." Zoning out, not hearing things that people are saying to you because you're thinking about something else. Being shut down, someone tells you something that's emotional and you are so overwhelmed and flooded with emotion in response to what they said that you can't think, you don't know how you feel, and you can't speak. Losing time, losing time is when you [00:06:00] let's say it's Monday and you can't remember anything you did on Sunday, Saturday.

[00:06:09] The last thing you remember was the previous Wednesday, for example. That's losing time because you still existed since last Wednesday. And obviously you were going about your life. You went to work, you have groceries in the, in the pantry. So, you know, you went to the grocery store. But you can't remember any of it. That's an example of dissociation that we call losing time.

[00:06:37] Flashbacks can be dissociation when you are reliving something and you don't really feel like you are as present to what's happening right now, and you're more feeling like you're back there, when that thing happened before, that's a form of dissociation.

[00:06:58] So dissociation is [00:07:00] confusing because you could be talking with someone and carrying on your part of the conversation and keeping eyes, eye contact, and there's really no indication that they would have that you're dissociating, but in your mind, while you're carrying on that conversation with them, you're also reliving memories of things that happened years ago that were painful and traumatic for you, that you were never able to integrate into who you are. And so, they're just there, separate from you, but coming up through your unconscious, whether in your body memories, or your thoughts that you're present to now.

[00:07:51] Another way that we dissociate is to be separated from our emotions. So, there are a lot of people who learn to [00:08:00] shut off their emotions and they may think 'I'm so

angry,' or 'I'm so sad,' or 'I'm so scared or anxious.' and that thought may show up as, ruminating, obsessing, trying to plan,' I don't know what to do. How's it all going to go? I have to prepare,' but there's really no emotional connection. So, you may say I'm sad, but you're not crying. You may say 'I'm so anxious,' but you don't actually feel anxious. You're just thinking racing thoughts that let you know that you're anxious.

[00:08:49] The disconnect between mind and body is a pretty common way that we dissociate. And again, that is very common for people who grow up learning that it's not [00:09:00] safe to express their emotions because their parents don't like it. They get upset; they are punished. Maybe they're physically harmed when they cry, or when they whine, or when they even are too happy, making too much noise. So another way that dissociation sometimes shows up is people say 'I went into a dark place and it was really hard to get out,' or they'll say 'I went away in my mind.' And when I might ask, when you went away in your mind, where did you go? And they'll say, I don't know.

[00:09:36] So to learn more about dissociation, there are many episodes of Therapy Chat that cover this, and I'm also going to list some other resources. If you think that you may be dissociative, um, there are two books that I can recommend. One is Janina Fisher's book, [00:10:00] *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors*, which is for trauma survivors to read.

[00:10:07] And it's also for people who love trauma survivors or want to help trauma survivors like helping professionals. This book explains in much more depth than I am, the neuroscience behind fragmentation caused by traumatic dissociation, and how to heal from it. And another book that's really good for it is the *Trauma Tool Kit: Healing PTSD from the Inside Out* by Susan Pease Banitt. I'll put links to both of those in the show notes.

[00:10:38] If you want to understand more about dissociative identity disorder, there is a fantastic podcast called *System Speak*, which is hosted by a person who has dissociative identity disorder and speaks about it, and [00:11:00] interviews experts on the topic from the perspective of her own lived experience. It's very interesting and very informative to listen to that. I will put links to the pertinent episodes of Therapy Chat in the show notes for this episode as well. Most recently, there was a compilation episode that is the 10 most popular episodes of Therapy Chat on trauma, attachment, and dissociation, it's episode number 277. I'll post the link to that in the show notes, and that episode itself has links to each of the 10 episodes. One of those 10 is a four- part episode on dissociation, and structural dissociation, and parts work. So, feel free to [00:12:00] check that out.

[00:12:02] All right. That's all I got to say for today about dissociation. I hope this has been helpful. If you like Trauma Chat, please go to iTunes and leave a rating and review that way they will show Trauma Chat to more people. If nobody rates it, basically iTunes basically says it doesn't exist. So, I'm grateful for any support that you can offer.

[00:12:33] Thanks so much. Talk to you soon.