



## MONTHLY MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

Presented by the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office Mental Health Task Force

### In This Issue: Depersonalization/ Derealization Disorder



### What is Depersonalization/Derealization Disorder (DP/DD)?

DP/DD involves an overwhelming feeling of being detached from one's body or mental processes, as though they were observing their life from the outside looking in (**depersonalization**), and/or a feeling of being completely detached from one's surroundings as though they were not really here (**derealization**). Many people have a passing experience of depersonalization or derealization, but when these feelings keep occurring or never completely go away and interfere with relationships, work and disrupt your ability to function in normal activities it is then considered to be DP/DD. This disorder falls under the larger heading of *Dissociative Disorders*.

#### Symptoms of Depersonalization include:

Feelings that you're an outside observer of your thoughts, feelings, your body or parts of your body — for example, as if you were floating in air above yourself

Feeling like a robot or experiencing a sense that your body, legs or arms appear distorted, enlarged or shrunken, or that your head is wrapped in some material like plastic or cloth.

Emotional or physical numbness of your senses or responses to the world around you.

A sense that your memories lack emotion, and that they may or may not be true or even your own.

#### Symptoms of Derealization include:

Feelings of being alienated from or unfamiliar with your surroundings — for example, like you're living in a movie, a dream, or someone else's life.

Feeling emotionally disconnected from people you care about, as if you were separated by a glass wall.

Surroundings that appear distorted, blurry, colorless, two-dimensional or artificial, or a hyper-awareness and clarity of your surroundings.

Distortions in perception of time, such as recent events feeling like distant memories.

Distortions of distance and the size and shape of objects.

#### Living with DP/DD

Passing episodes of DP/DD are quite common. Many people have this sensation briefly. Most will report a fleeting feeling of being detached from themselves or the environment. Some say it is like you're watching yourself in a movie. Experts estimate it occurs in about half of the population. It's rare for brief episodes of DP/DD to require treatment.

Having experienced a brief episode of DP/DD is not necessarily a cause for serious concern. However, ongoing or severe feelings of detachment and distortion of your surroundings can be a sign of DP/DD or another physical or mental disorder and in such cases patients should see a Mental Health Professional.

Episodes of DP/DD could last anywhere from a few hours to months. For some, these episodes turn into ongoing feelings that may periodically get better or worse.

Most people with this condition do not lose touch with reality. The majority realize their perceptions aren't real.

Depersonalization or derealization episodes can also be signs of other conditions, such as:

Brain diseases.

Seizure disorders.

Psychiatric/neurological disorders, such as dementia and schizophrenia.

#### Causes and Treatment for DP/DD

The cause of DP/DD is still unknown. Biological and environmental factors may play a part. Some may be at a higher risk for developing this disorder due to one or more of the following:

- \*A nervous system that's less reactive to emotions.
- \*Personality Disorders or other Mental Disorders.
- \*Physical conditions, such as a seizure disorder.

Dissociative disorders like DP/DD can also occur after intense stress or trauma, such as:

- \*Having a parent with severe mental illness.
- \*Witnessing or experiencing abuse.
- \*Witnessing or experiencing severe accidents.
- \*Exposure to Life-threatening danger.
- \*Experiencing or being exposed to Natural disasters.
- \*Sudden death of a loved one.
- \*Violence whether it be from war or domestic issues
- \*Certain drugs, such as hallucinogens.
- \*Fatigue and sleep deprivation or sensory stimulation, which may happen in an intensive care unit.

#### Treatment:

Complete recovery is possible. For some, DP/DD disappears on its own. Some cases require therapy to help find and cope with the triggers. The treatment may include:

- \*Cognitive-behavioral therapy
- \*Dialectic-behavior therapy
- \*Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing
- \*Family therapy
- \*Hypnotherapy
- \*Creative therapies such as Art or Music therapy

In some cases medications such as those used to treat Depression and/or Anxiety are indicated.

#### REFERENCES

The G.C.S.O. Mental Health Task Force encourages you to utilize the sources listed below and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov) to learn more about this and other important health topics.

Diagnostic Statistical Manual - V, American Psychiatric Association, Washington, DC. June 2013

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4204471/>

<https://www.merckmanuals.com/professional/psychiatric-disorders/dissociative-disorders/depersonalization-derealization-disorder>

<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2022-73925-001>

[gcsomhtaskforce@gwinnettcounty.com](mailto:gcsomhtaskforce@gwinnettcounty.com)

Major T. Maldonado, Unit Commander  
770 619-6798  
Dr. D. E. Tatum, Clinical Director  
770 822-3111

