

Dictionary of Trauma & Dissociation Psychology Terms

A - C

D - F

G - I

J - L

M - O

P - S

T - V

W - Z

A-Z

of
Trauma and Dissociation

From abreaction to zone out

Glossary of Trauma Psychology Terms

A

abreaction

the release of strong emotions in connection with an experience or perception (usually a past experience). Abreactions can be either spontaneous or aided by psychotherapy. Research shows they help reduce symptoms and make overall improvements in treatment.

DID Adult treatment guidelines, p141-142.

abuse

Interactions in which one person behaves in a violent, demeaning or invasive manner towards another person (e.g. child or partner).

VandenBos, Gary R. (Ed), American Psychological Association (2006).

APA Dictionary of Psychology. ISBN 1591473802.

addiction

Drug or alcohol addiction is the 'repeated use of a psychoactive substance or substances, to the extent that the user (referred to as an addict) is periodically or chronically intoxicated, shows a compulsion to take the preferred substance (or substances), has great difficulty in voluntarily ceasing or modifying substance use, and exhibits a determination to obtain psychoactive substances by almost any means.' Gambling is an addiction not involving substance use.

World Health Organization: WHO Lexicon of Drug and Alcohol terms, retrieved on 1 May 2014. p6 DSM-5 (2013) p xxix

affect

affect is 'a person's present emotional responsiveness, which can be inferred from facial expressions' including both the degree and range of expressive behavior. This can also be shown in tone of voice, hand and body movements.

Sadock, Benjamin James (2008) (coauthors: Sadock, Virginia Alcott). Kaplan & Sadock's concise textbook of clinical psychiatry.

Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. ISBN 0781787467. p6

akinesia

Loss of muscle movement, may affect the eyes, head or even entire body. Movements may also be sluggish, e.g., walking, talking or dressing. Not caused by lack of strength or awareness.

Moore, David P. (2008). Textbook of Clinical Neuropsychiatry. Gray, S. and Zide, M. (2007) Psychopathology: A Competency-Based Assessment Model for Social Workers.

amnesia

memory loss, can be for specific events or periods of times

Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000).

anaesthesia, anesthesia

Loss of feeling in part or all of the body.

Colman, A. M. (2015). A Dictionary of Psychology

anosmia

Loss of sense of smell.

Colman, A. M. (2015). A Dictionary of Psychology. Gray, S. and Zide, M. (2007). Psychopathology: A Competency-Based Assessment Model for Social Workers.

anterograde amnesia

memory loss for events which occur after a trauma or shock

Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p21

aphonia

Loss of ability to speak.

Colman, A. M. (2015). A Dictionary of Psychology

aphrasia

another name for mutism. Colman, A. M. (2015). A Dictionary of Psychology
apraxia
Inability to perform skilled, purposeful movements. Colman, A. M. (2015). A Dictionary of Psychology
ataxia
Uncoordinated movement. ICD-10 (1992)
avoidance
keeping away from cues, activities or situations that are reminders of a stressful event from the past. Avoiding trauma reminders is a required criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder. DSM-5, p818.
B
C
catathymic amnesia
Memory loss for a specific event only Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p56
comorbid, comorbidity
Two or more mental or physical disorders are currently diagnosed in a person. Corsini, R. Dictionary of Psychology (2002).
confabulation, memory falsification
A memory distortion which involves a person inventing details to fill in gaps in memory. Involves falsifying memory details. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p246
counseling, counselling
A form of therapy that aims to help people understand and resolve their problems. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p87
D
defensive amnesia
Motivated forgetting of unpleasant or conflict-ridden, anxiety-provoking events. A way of protecting a person from guilt or embarrassment. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p97
delusion
A false belief which a person strongly believes despite evidence to the contrary or obvious proof that the belief is false. The belief must not ordinarily accepted by others of the person's culture, or by society. DSM-5 Glossary
Depersonalization
Feeling as if you are unreal/not real, detached or observing yourself from outside yourself regarding your thoughts, feelings, sensations, body or actions.DSM-5, p302. Examples include altered perceptions, a distorted sense of time, unreal or absent self and feeling emotionally or physically numb.
Derealization
Experiencing your surroundings as unreality or feeling detached from them. Examples include people or objects seeming 'unreal, dreamlike, foggy, lifeless, or visually distorted'. DSM-5, p302.
diplopia
double vision Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000).
dual diagnosis
Co-occurrence of a psychoactive substance use disorder and another psychiatric disorder in the same person. Less commonly refers to two psychiatric diagnoses without a substance use disorder. World Health Organization (1994). WHO Lexicon of Drug and Alcohol terms. p36.
dysarthria
Slurred speech or difficulties in speech due to muscle problems. Colman, A. M. (2015). A Dictionary of Psychology
dyskinesia
Involuntary repetitive bodily movements. Tarditive dyskinesia involves the tongue, jaw, hands or fingers only and can be a side effect of some neuroleptic medication. Colman, A. M. (2015). A Dictionary of Psychology.
dysphonia, dystonic movement, dystonic
Abnormal movement in part of the body, e.g. muscle cramping.

dysphoric, dysphoria
An unpleasant mood, such as sadness or depression, anxiety, or irritability. DSM-5 Glossary
E
elevated mood, elevated
An exaggerated feeling of well-being or euphoria, e.g., high, ecstatic, on top of the world, or up in the clouds. DSM-5 Glossary
euthymic
A mood which is in the 'normal' range, meaning neither depressed nor elevated mood. Colman, A. M. (2015). A Dictionary of Psychology.
executive control
A term used in Dissociative Identity Disorder. The dissociative part (alter identity) that has full control of an individual's behavior is said to have executive control at that time. Coping with Trauma-Related Dissociation: Skills Training for Patients and Therapists, p27. ISBN 039370646X.
F
flashback
A reactivated traumatic memory experienced, a feeling or sense of reliving past trauma in the present. A symptom of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and common in complex Dissociative Disorders. Coping with Trauma-Related Dissociation: Skills Training for Patients and Therapists, p166. ISBN 039370646X.
G
H
hallucination, hallucinations
A perception that does not involve external senses, e.g., seeing, hearing, or smelling things which aren't there. Brief hallucinations can occur without a mental disorder. DSM-5 Glossary.
hypervigilance
constantly checking the environment for signs of danger or finding threat in things that would have appeared harmless beforehand. Common in post-traumatic stress disorders, paranoid personality disorder and children abused/neglected by parents. Regel, Joseph, S and Regel, S. (2010). Post-traumatic Stress. ISBN 0199566585. Campbell, Robert J. Campbell's Psychiatric Dictionary (2009). ISBN 10195341597.
hypnogenic
Hypnogenic refers to the beginning of sleep. A hypnogenic state is the drowsy interval between waking and sleeping at the beginning of sleep. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). ISBN 8177640305
hypnopompic
A hypnopompic state is the state of consciousness when beginning to wake from sleep, just before waking. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000).
hypnosis
A trance-like mental state caused by suggestion in a cooperative person. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000) p189.
I
ictal, postictal, post-ictal
ictal refers to seizures or strokes, postictal refers to after a seizure or stroke Dictionary of Psychiatry (2012). Thakurdas H., Thakurdas L., & Thakurdas, B.
ideation
ideas or mental images, for example suicidal or paranoid ideation. VandenBos, Gary R. (Ed), American Psychological Association (2006). APA Dictionary of Psychology. ISBN 1591473802. p278
illusion, illusions
An external stimulus that is misperceived or misinterpreted. DSM-5 Glossary.
irritable mood, irritable, irritability
Easily annoyed and provoked to anger. DSM-5 Glossary
J
K

L
limbic system
A group of connected pathways and centers in the brain which are believed to have an important role in emotion, motivation and memory. Includes the hippocampus, hypothalamus, amygdala, paraolfactory area, epithalamus and others. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000) p232.
M
macropsia
Objects appear smaller than they actual are. A perceptual distortion present in Derealization, but physical conditions may also cause this. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000) p237. DSM-5 p303.
made feelings, “made” feelings or emotions, “made” feelings
unexpected surges of feelings, e.g., pain, hurt, anger, fear, shame, which are puzzling to the person. Fairly common in people with non-dissociative disorders eg PTSD, Borderline Personality Disorder, Bipolar, Panic Disorder and ADHD. Dissociation and the dissociative disorders: DSM-V and beyond (2009), p231.
made impulses, “made” impluses
these often feel like they are coming from someone or somewhere else, as if they don't belong to the person. e.g. hostile, angry or sexual impulses can be part of an internal struggle between alters/alter and host parts of a person with Dissociative Identity Disorder. Dissociation and the dissociative disorders: DSM-V and beyond (2009), p231.
made actions, “made” actions, “made” acts
Very frequently in Dissociative Identity Disorder, some behavior doesn't feel like yours, and you may be or may not be fully aware of it at the time. Either 1) watching the self do things on its own, 2) feeling overpowered, taken over, controlled, described as possessed in some cultures, 3) a particular part of the body seems to have a mind of its own, and performs unintended acts. Dissociation and the dissociative disorders: DSM-V and beyond (2009), p231.
magical thinking
The erroneous belief that your thoughts, words, or actions will cause or prevent a particular outcome in a way that defies commonly understood laws of cause and effect. May be a part of normal child development. DSM-5 Glossary
mania
A mental state of elevated, expansive, or irritable mood and persistently increased level of activity or energy. DSM-5 Glossary.
manipulativeness, manipulative
Using subterfuge (e.g., tricks) to influence or control others; using of seduction, charm, glibness, or ingratiation to achieve one's ends. E.g. Crying, throwing a tantrum, and lying or scheming solely to gain special consideration. Grouped within the antagonism personality trait. DSM-5 Glossary. Corsini, R. J. (2002).The Dictionary of Psychology.
melancholia, melancholic
A mental state characterized by very severe depression. DSM-5 Glossary
mental disorder
A disorder is not the same as an 'illness' or 'disease'. It refers to a "clinically recognizable set of symptoms or behaviour associated in most cases with distress and with interference with personal functions." DSM-5.
micropsia
Objects appear larger than they actual are. A perceptual distortion present in Derealization, but physical conditions may also cause this. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000) p251. DSM-5 p303.
mood
Mood is an overall emotion, e.g., depression, elation, anger or anxiety. Unlike affect, "which refers to more fluctuating changes in emotional 'weather,' mood refers to a pervasive and sustained emotional 'climate.'" DSM-5 Glossary.
myoclonus
Involuntary spasms causing jerking movements. Unlike tics they cannot be voluntarily suppressed for a time. Nocturnal myoclonus occurs at night, e.g., restless-leg syndrome. DSM-5 Glossary
N
negative affect
Frequent and intense experiences of high levels of a wide range of negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression, irritability). DSM-5 Glossary
neurasthenia
Unexplained fatigue and lassitude (lethargy). Often accounted for by depression or anxiety.

ICD-10, Gray, S. and Zide, M. (2007). Psychopathology: A Competency-Based Assessment Model for Social Workers.
neuroticism
A personality trait of negative moods. DSM-5 (2013) Somatic Symptom Disorder section.
nomenclature
a list of diagnostic terms that are agreed upon by mental health professionals Oxford Textbook of Psychopathology (Vol. 4, 1999)
O
organic amnesia
Memory loss or disturbances caused by physiological changes resulting from toxic substances, e.g. lead poisoning or damage to nerve cells. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p287
P
paraesthesia
Numbness, pricking or tingling sensations. Gray, S. and Zide, M. (2007) Psychopathology: A Competency-Based Assessment Model for Social Workers
paranoid ideation, paranoid
Paranoid ideation means paranoid ideas and thoughts, but delusional paranoid. Being suspicious of others or believing that you are being harassed, persecuted, or unfairly treated. DSM-5 Glossary
pathological
Abnormal or outside the normal. DSM-5 (2013)
personality disorder, personality disorders
A person has an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or impairment'. DSM-5 p645
pseudoseizures, dissociative convulsions, PNES
Pseudoseizures, also known as dissociative convulsions or psychogenic seizures, are seizures which are not epileptic. A form of conversion disorder that is more common in people with other disorders, including panic disorder and dissociative identity disorder. ICD-10, DSM-5 p319.
psychogenic, functional
Psychogenic has different meanings but indicates that obvious life events or difficulties playing a major role in the genesis of a mental health disorder, e.g., conflict or stress. Functional disorder is an equivalent term. DSM-5, p302.
psychiatrist
A medical doctor who has chosen to specialise in treating mental disorders. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p339
psychoactive drug, psychoactive
Drugs which affect behavior and consciousness in people. Includes both psychiatric medication and many commonly abused drugs. 339 Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p339
psychological trauma
'Trauma can be understood as the experience of being made into an object; the victim of someone else's rage, of nature's indifference, or of one's own physical and psychological limitations. Along with the pain and fear associated with rape, combat trauma, or natural disaster come a marginally bearable sense of helplessness, a realization that one's own will and wishes become irrelevant to the course of events, leaving either a view of the self that is damaged; contaminated by humiliation, pain, and fear that the event imposed, or a fragmented sense of self.' David Spiegel (1990). Trauma, Dissociation and Hypnosis.
psychologist
A 'professionally trained individual who devotes his time and effort to study, research, writing, teaching or practice in one or more branches of psychology.' May work in schools, colleges, clinics, industry, prison, military or the government.'. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p341
psychosocial stressor
A life situation that creates severe enough stress to contribute to or precipitate a psychological disorder. Examples include divorce, bereavement, prolonged illness and natural calamities. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p342
psychosomatic
Psychosomatic relates to both the mind and the body together, used where physical symptoms have no obvious physical cause. A physical cause may exist but is not apparent at the time of diagnosis. Symptoms may be caused by psychological factors, e.g.,

stress. In the ICD-10 manual this includes somatoform and eating disorders, and sexual dysfunction. ICD-10. Colman (2015). A dictionary of psychology.
Q
R
racing thoughts, mind racing
experiencing uncontrollable, random thoughts and memories, with very fast switches between them, prevents the person focusing on one topic or sleeping. DSM-5 glossary.
revictimization
People who have been victims of trauma in the past are at a greater risk of being traumatized again, known as revictimization. Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experiences on Mind, Body, and Society (2012) p11. ISBN 1462507107.
S
screen memory
A partially true memory that is subconsciously created because the actual memory is unbearable, e.g. a memory of abuse by a distant uncle when actually the abuser was the father. Allows time to adjust to aspects of the abuse before accepting the full reality. Sirdan Institute.
sense of agency, and agency
A sense of 'ownership or control', part of the Dissociative Identity Disorder criteria, DSM-5 (2013), p293
self-alteration, self alteration
your body feels as if it has become small like a young child, or may feel like it has suddenly changed gender, or you may seem to see someone else's face in the mirror Dissociation and the dissociative disorders: DSM-V and beyond (2009), p231-232.
sense of self
A person with a dissociative disorder may suddenly become 'a depersonalized observer to their 'own' speech and actions, which they may feel powerless to stop'. Feelings, speech or actions may be described as 'not mine' (disowned). Dissociative Identity Disorder, DSM-5 (2013), p293
Somatic disorder, somatic
Of the body. A somatic disorder is an organic (physical) disorder. Basavanna, M. Dictionary of Psychology (2000). p401
startle response, startle reaction
An involuntary and reflexive reaction to a sudden and unexpected event, such as a loud noise or sharp movement. A symptom of PTSD. DSM-5 Glossary.
stress
a stress response is the responses of a person to the events that disturb that person's equilibrium, and 'tax or exceed' his/her ability to cope. DSM-5 glossary.
substance abuse
Of the body. A somatic disorder is an organic (physical) disorder. World Health Organization (1994). WHO Lexicon of Drug and Alcohol terms.
substance dependence, dependence
substance dependence involves symptoms of tolerance and withdrawal, but does not always indicate addiction. Substance Abuse and Substance Dependence are called Substance Use Disorders in the DSM5. DSM-5 (2013) p. xiii.
substance use
A substance use disorder results in "a cluster of cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms" and involves a pathological (abnormal) pattern of behaviors' relating to the substance use. Use continues despite significant substance-related problems. Examples include craving and impaired social functioning. DSM-5 (2013) p483
subsyndromal
a condition that does not meet full criteria for a diagnosis, e.g., because not enough symptoms are present or symptoms are not severe enough than those needed in the diagnostic criteria, but that they can still be identified and related to the full-blown condition. DSM-5 glossary.
T
temporal lobe epilepsy, complex partial seizures, psychomotor siezures
Temporal lobe epilepsy causes complex partial seizures: organized but semiautomatic movements (complex motor activity) carried during mental disturbance. Incontinence and confusion afterwards are common. Campbell's Psychiatric Dictionary (2004)

thought insertion
strong thoughts seem to come out of nowhere, they often feel either like they don't belong to the person (ego-alien) or as if they are from an external source). Intrusive thoughts caused by PTSD fit into this. Dissociation and the dissociative disorders: DSM-V and beyond (2009), p231.
thought withdrawal
thoughts are suddenly taken away or the mind goes blank Dissociation and the dissociative disorders: DSM-V and beyond (2009), p231.
trigger, triggers, triggered
A trauma trigger is a reminder of a past traumatizing event, triggers may cause flashbacks, nightmares, hallucinations, delusions, or illusions that relate to the trauma, severe anxiety or panic attacks, or a frozen response. Coping with Trauma-Related Dissociation: Skills Training for Patients and Therapists, p36
U
unusual belief or experience, unusual beliefs, unusual belief
believing that one has unusual abilities, but not held with the same degree of conviction as delusions. E.g., mind reading, telekinesis, unusual experiences of reality including believing hallucinations are real. Considered a personality trait. DSM-5 glossary.
V
W
withdrawal syndrome, drug withdrawal, withdrawal symptoms
Withdrawal symptoms can occur when a substance or medication is reduced or stopped. Withdrawal symptoms do not count towards a substance use disorder if the substance was medically prescribed (and taken as directed). DSM-5.
X
Y
Z
zone out
An example of mild dissociation, e.g. missing part of a conversation. Only problematic when it regularly interferes with life. The Trauma Model Therapy. Colin A. Ross & Naomi Halpern (2009).

See also:

- [Books](#)
- [Information about Trauma and Dissociative Disorders](#)
- [Types of Alters](#) in [Dissociative Identity Disorder](#)
- [Sitemap](#)

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