



AUTISM AND DISSOCIATION:

UNDERSTANDING WHEN TRAUMA OVERWHELMS THE AUTISTIC MIND



Dissociation is a natural protective response to overwhelming stress or trauma. For autistic individuals, sensory, emotional, and social overwhelm can trigger dissociation—causing a disconnect from self, time, or surroundings.

*Compassion. Connection. Consistency.
These are the keys to healing.*



WHAT IS DISSOCIATION?

Dissociation is when the mind disconnects from thoughts, feelings, memories, or the surrounding environment.

It's the brain's way of protecting itself from perceived danger or overwhelming stress.



WHY AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS MAY BE MORE VULNERABLE

- ✓ Sensory overload
- ✓ Difficulty expressing emotions
- ✓ Social stress and misunderstandings
- ✓ Changes in routine or unexpected events
- ✓ Past or ongoing trauma
- ✓ Feeling unsafe or misunderstood



DID YOU KNOW?

Dissociation is not a choice or attention-seeking. It's a survival response.

With the right support, the brain can learn it's safe to reconnect.



SIGNS OF DISSOCIATION TO LOOK FOR



Staring off or "checked out" look



Gaps in memory or lost time



Confusion about where they are or what's happening



Feeling numb, foggy, or unreal



Not responding or seeming "distant"



Trouble finding words or speaking



Repeating words or phrases



Changes in body language or movement



Every child is different. Look for patterns and what is typical for your child.



HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT

- STAY CALM:** Your calm helps their nervous system feel safe.
- CREATE SAFETY:** Reduce demands and sensory input.
- USE GENTLE VOICE:** Speak softly and simply.
- OFFER GROUNDING TOOLS:** Tapping, deep breathing, fidgets, weighted items, or calming visuals.
- VALIDATE FEELINGS:** "You're safe. I'm here with you."
- BE PRESENT:** Sit with them. No pressure to talk.
- KEEP ROUTINE:** Predictability brings security.



WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Don't force them to "snap out of it."
- ✗ Don't take it personally.
- ✗ Don't ask too many questions.
- ✗ Don't increase demands.
- ✗ Don't ignore it—your support matters.



GROUNDING IDEAS THAT CAN HELP



Deep breathing



Tapping or gentle pressure



5-4-3-2-1 sensory check-in



Hold a comfort item



Listen to calm music



Look around & name what you see



Drink water or have a snack



Movement (stretch, walk, swing)



Positive self-talk or affirmations



Visuals or calm down cards



A GENTLE REMINDER FOR CAREGIVERS

- ♥ You are not alone.
- ♥ Your support makes a difference.
- ♥ Healing takes time.
- ♥ Small moments of connection create big change.
- ♥ Take care of yourself too—you can't pour from an empty cup.



When trauma overwhelms, connection helps them find their way back to safety within themselves.



For more resources, printables, and support for parents and caregivers, visit:

♥ lifeafterabaclassroom.com ♥

Together, we can create a world of understanding and support.

Scan to read the full article!

