WHAT IS DISSOCIATION?

WHEN YOU FEEL DISCONNECTED FROM YOURSELF OR THE WORLD AROUND YOU

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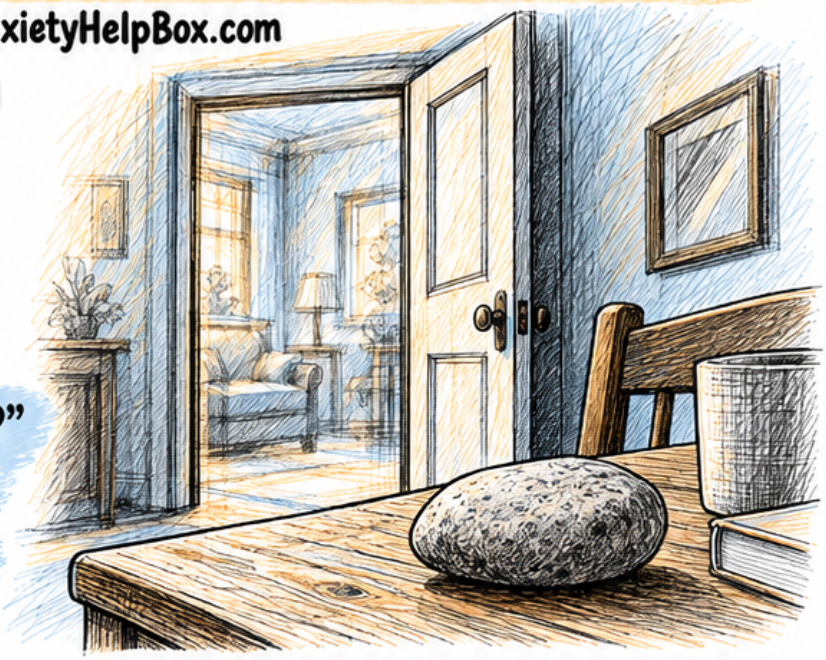

You're here, but somehow you don't feel completely here.

Everything may feel distant, unreal or dreamlike. You might feel numb, foggy or disconnected from your body.

You may think:

"Why does everything feel strange?"
"Why don't I feel like myself?"
"Why do I feel so far away?"

This can be dissociation.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING?

Dissociation is a disconnection in how you experience your thoughts, feelings, memories, body or surroundings.

It can be mild and brief, or much stronger.

It can happen during stress, anxiety or overwhelming experiences, but sometimes there isn't an obvious trigger.

The experience can feel frightening, but feeling disconnected doesn't mean you're losing touch with reality.

WHAT CAN IT FEEL LIKE?

You might:

- feel detached from yourself or your emotions
- feel as though you're watching yourself from outside
- feel like the world around you isn't quite real
- feel numb, foggy or far away
- feel as though you're on autopilot
- lose track of time or what's happening around you
- have gaps in your memory

People experience dissociation in different ways. You don't need to have all of these experiences.

DEPERSONALIZATION OR DEREALIZATION?

These are two common forms of dissociation:

DEPERSONALIZATION

You feel disconnected from yourself. You might feel strange in your body or as though you're watching yourself from the outside.

DEREALIZATION

You feel disconnected from the world around you. Things may seem distant, dreamlike, flat or unreal.

With these experiences, you usually still know that you and the world are real, even though they don't feel normal.

WHAT CAN HELP RIGHT NOW?

Don't fight to force yourself to "feel normal."
Instead, gently reconnect with what's around you.

Try:

- press your feet into the floor and notice the pressure
- name five things you can see
- hold something cool or textured
- notice the sounds around you
- say where you are and what you're doing
- move your hands, arms or legs
- step somewhere calmer if you're overwhelmed

Then continue with something simple and familiar.

Try not to repeatedly check: **"Do I feel normal yet?"**

Constantly checking can keep your attention stuck on the strange feeling.

If dissociation happens often, lasts a long time, causes memory gaps or interferes with your daily life, talk to a health professional.

Dissociation can make you feel disconnected from yourself or the world. You don't have to force the feeling away – gently bring your attention back to where you are, one thing at a time.

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What Is Dissociation?

What Is Dissociation? is an illustrated psychoeducation handout about feeling disconnected from yourself, your body, memories or the world around you. It covers depersonalisation, derealisation, common signs such as feeling numb or unreal, and practical grounding strategies for managing episodes of disconnection.

Teenagers, adults, counsellors, school pastoral teams and families can print it for therapy sessions, anxiety support plans, wellbeing lessons or home use. Reading through the prompts together can help someone recognise their experience, practise sensory grounding and choose a familiar activity that brings attention back to the present.