Understanding dissociation

What dissociation is, why it happens and how to come back to the present.

Dissociation is a disconnection from your thoughts, feelings, body or surroundings. Everyone does it mildly: daydreaming, or driving a familiar road and not remembering the journey. During overwhelming stress it is a way of getting away mentally when you cannot get away physically.

What it can be like

- [ ] Feeling spaced out, foggy or far away
- [ ] Feeling unreal, or as if in a dream
- [ ] The world looking flat, distant or strange
- [ ] Watching myself from outside
- [ ] Feeling numb, emotionally or physically
- [ ] Losing track of time, or gaps in memory
- [ ] Not recognising where I am for a moment
- [ ] Going blank mid-conversation

Why it keeps happening

If dissociation protected you once, your brain may reach for it at any sign of stress, including strong feelings, conflict or reminders of the past. It becomes automatic. It is not something you are doing wrong.

Coming back

1. **Notice the early signs.** Fog, tunnel vision, sounds fading, a floaty feeling.
2. **Move.** Stand up, stretch, stamp your feet, walk.
3. **Wake up your senses.** Cold water on your hands or face. A strong mint. A textured object.
4. **Orient.** Say your name, your age, the date and where you are. Name what you can see.
5. **Connect.** Make eye contact or talk to someone, if someone safe is there.

Reducing it over time

- Learn your triggers and your early warning signs.
- Look after sleep, food and stress levels. Dissociation is more likely when you are run down.
- Practise grounding when you are calm, so it is there when you need it.

> **In sessions**
> If you notice yourself drifting, tell me or give a signal. We will pause and help you come back.

My notes and questions

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What keeps me steady

Your warning signs, and the grounding, people and places that help you stay steady.

Name _____ Date _____

Signs that I am becoming overwhelmed or starting to shut down

Grounding that works for me

Senses, movement, orienting

Soothing that works for me

Comfort, warmth, kindness

People I can be with or contact

Places where I feel calm

Things to avoid when I am struggling (they seem to help and do not)

Words I want to hear from myself

What I will do after a difficult session or a hard day

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