

Dealing with Rejection-Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD)

Many autistic adults have experienced social exclusion and bullying in school, at college, and at home, making them extra sensitive to signs of rejection.

Rejection-sensitivity dysphoria can include a range of painful feelings like guilt, shame and self-hatred that can be evoked by subtle shifts in attention, delays in communication, or changes in social arrangements.

However, rejection is a risk in many life situations, such as job hunting, dating, or making new friends. It is a common experience for everybody and not a reflection of a person's worth and value. Learning how to minimize sensitivity to anticipated rejection is an essential life skill.

Step 1: Psychoeducation

The first step when discussing your client's sensitivity to rejection should involve normalizing rejection. This can help them accept that rejection is part of every adult's life.

It's also important for autistic clients to understand that sensitivity to rejection is based on a strength, which is caring and compassion for themselves and others.

Your autistic client may think they have been rejected because they did something wrong or hurt or upset people unintentionally. If they didn't care so much, then rejection would be easier to manage. It is worth reminding your client that people who are inclusive and care a lot for others can be especially sensitive to rejection.

Step 2: Recall a recent incident that led to RSD

Next, ask your client to bring to mind a recent incident where they experienced RSD. Ask them to list their sensations and feelings using the table below.

What was the incident?	How did you feel?

Step 3: Practicing self-compassion affirmations

Self-compassion when experiencing RSD or the pain of rejection is essential. Remind your client that the reason rejection hurts is because they care about others and don't want to upset them. They want to be included and do the right thing.

The care they have for others is valuable. Self-compassion involves offering that care to themselves too.

Ask your client to consider which statements they could have applied to their recent experience.

- This moment is distressing, but it will pass.
- This is a difficult experience, but I feel pain because I care.
- My worth is not based on one experience.
- Human beings make mistakes. My mistakes don't define me.
- I have overcome challenges before, and I will overcome this one.
- I can learn from difficult experiences. They help me grow.

With patience and consistency, using self-compassion affirmations can help manage rejection sensitivity and promote greater emotional equilibrium.

***Tip:** If your client struggles a lot with RSD, you could use this worksheet as the basis of a self-compassion journal, either digital or on paper.

Have them record their experiences of RSD or actual rejection week to week, and apply self-compassion affirmations when feeling the pain of anticipated or actual rejection. In time, they will develop the self-compassion skills required to manage RSD.