

# Dissociative Disorders

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will focus on the topic of dissociative disorders by covering:

1. Dissociative Disorders
2. Dissociative Amnesia
3. Dissociative Identity Disorder
4. Treatment of Dissociative Disorders

## 1. Dissociative Disorders

Dissociative disorders are any disorder that involves the disruption or loss of a person's mental functioning or mental identity. These disorders occur in only about 2% to 3% of the population. They often derive from dissociation, which is a defense mechanism used by a person to protect themselves from psychological harm. It is often involuntary and can be damaging to a person as a result.

Dissociation protects a person's sense of self from being harmed by removing it from traumatic or harmful situations, like being molested as a child. The person then dissociates or distances themselves from that traumatic event. This results in separating from their own identity and even forgetting about who they are.

## 2. Dissociative Amnesia

**Dissociative amnesia** is where a person loses either part or all of their memory, particularly the part of memory that relates to who they are as a person. This type of amnesia is not caused by a physical injury, but rather results from some damaging event or emotional trauma that a person might have experienced.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** If a person is molested, they might block that memory or disassociate themselves from it. This can result in a loss of other memories as well. The person might lose significant portions of their childhood as a result of this traumatic event.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Dissociative Amnesia**

A dissociative disorder where a person loses part or all of their memory, particularly relating to who they are

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## 3. Dissociative Identity Disorder

**Dissociative identity disorder** is the most extreme and rarest type of dissociative disorder. It occurs, according to some estimates, within .01% to 1% of the population, and is also called multiple personality disorder. A person with this disorder has more than one different, distinct personality that display themselves at different times. The personalities will have completely different traits and abilities. Many times a person won't have any memory or knowledge of their other personalities.

This disorder is thought to occur because of an emotionally stressful situation or traumatic event. There is some debate among psychologists as to whether dissociative identity disorder is a legitimate disorder, and whether or not there has actually been an authentic case of this disorder in the past. This is a gray area of psychology that is up for debate currently. However, it is still important to recognize this as a disorder that people claim to be true.

### IN CONTEXT

The most famous case of a dissociative identity disorder is that of a woman named Shirley Ardell Mason, who used the pseudonym Sybil. Sybil was a psychological patient who was reported to have developed 16 different personalities as a result of severe sexual abuse as a child at the hand of her mother.

A book was written about her, and two movies were made based on her own story. However, several psychologists have challenged her claim to have these distinct identities. They believe instead that she was extremely suggestible, and that her psychologist took advantage of her to gain fame for himself.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Dissociative Identity Disorder**

A dissociative disorder where a person has more than one different, distinct personalities that display at different times; a.k.a. multiple personality disorder

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## 4. Treatment of Dissociative Disorders

Treatment of these different types of dissociative disorders involves creating a safe and comfortable therapeutic environment. This involves building a strong therapeutic alliance for a relationship between the patient and the therapist. It also involves reintegration and recovery of the lost elements of their selves--either their memories or their personalities. Understanding and accepting the trauma that causes the disorder to occur can often help in the reintegration of the dissociated parts of their minds.



### SUMMARY

**Dissociative disorders** involve the disruption or loss of a person's mental functioning or mental

identity. They are rare and are usually the result of a traumatic event. **Dissociative amnesia** is when a person loses part or all of their memory, usually relating to who they are as a person. **Dissociative identity disorder** refers to when a person develops one or more distinct personalities. Treatment involves reintegration and recovery of the lost elements of self, as well as understanding and accepting the trauma that caused the disorder.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia Author Erick Taggart.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Dissociative Amnesia**

A dissociative disorder where a person loses part or all of their memory, particularly relating to who they are.

### **Dissociative Identity Disorder**

A dissociative disorder where a person has more than one different, distinct personalities that display at different times; a.k.a. Multiple Personality Disorder.