



# INFO SHEET

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## What is Dissociation?

Dissociation is a mental process that involves a disconnection between a person's thoughts, feelings, and sense of surroundings leading to a feeling of detachment from oneself or the environment. It is a common coping mechanism that can occur in response to traumatic experiences, such as abuse or neglect, or in response to extreme stress.

It is also represented in everyday experiences such as when you become so absorbed in a book or film that you lose awareness of your surroundings. Or when you drive a familiar route and arrive at your destination without any memory of going through green lights or stopping at red lights. Similarly, some people may dissociate as part of certain cultural or religious practices. It can occur as a side effect of alcohol or some medications/substances, or when coming off some medication.

Dissociation can manifest in different ways, including feeling numb or detached from one's emotions, having memory lapses or feeling disconnected from one's body, experiencing altered states of consciousness, or feeling like one is observing oneself from outside the body.

While dissociation can be a temporary coping mechanism, it can become a long-term pattern that affects a person's ability to function in daily life and maintain healthy relationships.

## How can the Centre for Clinical Psychology help with Dissociation?

Currently there is no frontline therapy <sup>1</sup> for dissociation when it is the primary problem. However, often dissociation is a secondary issue due to another mental health problem. In these circumstances working on the primary problem can change the experience of dissociation<sup>2</sup>. The Centre for Clinical Psychology offers evidence-based treatments to help individuals with mental health issues often associated with dissociation, such as PTSD, CPTSD, anxiety and depression.

The Centre's experienced therapists work with individuals to address underlying trauma or stressors that contribute to mental health difficulties and associated dissociation. For example, by processing traumatic experiences, individuals can develop a greater sense of control over their thoughts and feelings, reducing the experience of dissociation <sup>2</sup> as a coping mechanism. Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) is often used when the dissociation is due to trauma,

If you or someone you know is struggling with dissociation, the Centre for Clinical Psychology can help. To book an appointment, call the clinic on 03 9077 0122 or visit their website at <https://ccp.net.au/booking/> to book online. The Centre's experienced therapists are here to support individuals in developing coping skills and processing underlying issues that may contribute to dissociation, helping them to live a healthier, more fulfilling life.

## References

1. <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD005331.pub3/full>
2. Resick, P. A., Suvak, M. K., Johnides, B. D., Mitchell, K. S., & Iverson, K. M. (2012). The impact of dissociation on PTSD treatment with cognitive processing therapy. *Depression and anxiety*, 29(8), 718–730.  
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