

# Understanding Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID)

## What is dissociation?

Dissociation is a natural survival response of the mind and body which exists on a continuum. Many people experience mild dissociation in everyday life, such as daydreaming or becoming absorbed in an activity.

Dissociation can also develop in response to overwhelming or repeated trauma. It helps protect the person by distancing them from experiences that were too distressing to fully process at the time. Dissociation is an adaptive response to threat; it is not a choice.

## What are dissociative disorders?

Dissociative disorders occur when dissociation becomes more persistent and begins to affect daily life.

### People may experience:

- Memory gaps or lost time
- Feeling detached from themselves or their surroundings
- Emotional overwhelm or emotional numbness
- Difficulties with relationships, work, or wellbeing

These responses reflect the nervous system's efforts to cope with overwhelming experiences.

## **What is Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) – previously known as Multiple Personality Disorder?**

DID is a dissociative disorder and the most complex form of trauma-related dissociation. It develops when severe and repeated trauma occurs during childhood, disrupting the integration of the developing sense of self.

### **As a survival adaptation, in DID:**

- Different parts of the person may hold different memories, feelings, or roles
- These parts are all aspects of one person
- Changes between parts are often subtle and not visible to others, but can sometimes be more overt with obvious switching between parts

In reality, people with DID are trying to manage the impacts of their trauma and of their dissociation while seeking to live their lives.

## **DID is real and recovery is possible**

DID is a recognised condition with a strong and growing evidence base.

### **With trauma-informed support, people can experience:**

- Greater stability and emotional regulation
- Reduced dissociation
- Improved daily functioning
- Increased sense of safety and wellbeing

Recovery happens gradually, at the person's pace, and is supported as by safety, trust, and respectful care.



## Understanding reduces stigma

Despite common misconceptions, people with DID are rarely dangerous. They have developed adaptive survival responses to overwhelming experiences.

Compassion, accurate information, and trauma-informed support make a meaningful difference to them, those who support them and the community overall. Documents such as *We are Jeni* play an important role in raising awareness and building understanding.

## Looking after yourself

It may help to:

- Take time to rest and regulate
- Talk with someone you trust
- Seek accurate, trauma-informed information
- Reach out for support if you need to.

## Support is available

If you or someone you care about needs support, you can contact:

### Blue Knot Helpline

1300 657 380

9am–5pm AEST/AEDT, 7 days

The Blue Knot Helpline provides free, confidential, trauma-informed support for adult survivors of complex trauma from childhood, as well as their families, friends, and supporters.

### Blue Knot Foundation

Supporting recovery from complex trauma and dissociation

[www.blueknot.org.au](http://www.blueknot.org.au)