

Coping With Trance States

Trance states, derealization, dissociation, spaceyness. What are they? What strategies can we use to cope with them? By trance states we mean dissociation, depersonalization, and derealization. In the group we called it spacing out or higher/altered states of consciousness. All humans have some propensity to have moments of dissociation. However, certain practices (meditation, chanting, learned processes of speaking in tongues, prolonged guided imagery, etc.) appear to have ingrained in many former members a reflexive response to involuntarily enter altered states of consciousness. (These altered states are defined fully in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM III]).

Even after leaving the group and ceasing its consciousness-altering practices, this habitual, learned response tends to recur under stress. For some former members this can be distressing and affect their functioning. When this happens, it tends to impair one's concentration, attention, memory, and coping skills.

Many former members coming from groups practicing prolonged consciousness altering find that the intensity, frequency, and duration of the episodes decrease when they deliberately and consistently use the strategies outlined below.

It is important to note that when one is tired, ill, or under stress, the feelings of spaceyness, dissociation, depersonalization, and derealization may temporarily return. By developing the ability to immediately label these states and attempting the following strategies, one can return to a consistent state of mental functioning.

Strategies

- Maintain a routine.
- Make change slowly, physically, emotionally, nutritionally, geographically, etc.
- Monitor health, watch nutrition, get medical checkups. Avoid drugs and alcohol.
- Take daily exercise to reduce dissociation (spaceyness, anxiety, and insomnia).
- Avoid sensory overload. Avoid crowds or large spaces without boundaries (shopping malls, video arcades, etc.).
- Drive consciously without music.

Reality orientation

- Establish time and place landmarks such as calendars and clocks.
- Make lists of activities in advance. Update lists daily or weekly. Difficult tasks and large projects should be kept on separate lists.
- Before going on errands, review lists of planned activities, purchases, and projects. Mark items off as you complete them.
- Keep updated on current news. News shows (CNN, Headline News, talk radio) are helpful because they repeat, especially if you have memory and concentration difficulties.

Reading

- Try to read one complete news article daily to increase comprehension.

- Develop reading "stamina" with the aid of a timer, and increase reading periods progressively.

Sleep interruptions

- Leave talk radio/television and news programs (not music) on all night.

Don't push yourself. After years or months, dissociation is a habit that takes time to break.

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