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# Dissociation and self-care



# Dissociative Experiences Scales (DES)

The Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) is a simple questionnaire widely used to screen for dissociative symptoms.

The DES is not a diagnostic instrument; it is designed for screening only. High scores on the DES do not show that a person has a dissociative disorder; they only suggest that clinical assessment for dissociation may be warranted.

This questionnaire consists of 28 questions about experiences that you may have in your daily life. We are interested in how often you have these experiences. It is important, however, that your answers show how often these experiences happen to you when you are not under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

To answer the questions, please determine to what degree the experience described in the question applies to you and select the number to show what percentage of the time you have the experience.

100% means 'always', 0% means 'never' with 10% increments in between.

If you are concerned about your results in any way, please speak with a qualified health professional.

Select a number to show what percentage of the time these happen to you

0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100%  
Never Always

1. Some people have the experience of driving a car and suddenly realising that they don't remember what has happened during all or part of the trip.
2. Some people find that sometimes they are listening to someone talk and they suddenly realise that they did not hear all or part of what was said.
3. Some people have the experience of finding themselves in a place and having no idea how they got there.
4. Some people have the experience of finding themselves dressed in clothes that they don't remember putting on.
5. Some people have the experience of finding new things among their belongings that they do not remember buying.
6. Some people sometimes find that they are approached by people that they do not know who call them by another name or insist that they have met them before.
7. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling as though they are standing next to themselves or watching themselves do something as if they were looking at another person.
8. Some people are told that they sometimes do not recognize friends or family members.
9. Some people find that they have no memory for some important events in their lives (for example, a wedding or graduation).
10. Some people have the experience of being accused of lying when they do not think that they have lied.

0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100%

Never

Always

11. Some people have the experience of looking in a mirror and not recognizing themselves.
12. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling that other people, objects and the world around them are not real.
13. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling that their body does not belong to them.
14. Some people have the experience of sometimes remembering a past event so vividly that they feel as if they were reliving that event.
15. Some people have the experience of not being sure whether things that they remember happening really did happen or whether they just dreamed them.
16. Some people have the experience of being in a familiar place but finding it strange and unfamiliar.
17. Some people find that when they are watching television or a movie they become so absorbed in the story that they are unaware of other events happening around them.
18. Some people sometimes find that they become so involved in a fantasy or daydream that it feels as though it were really happening to them.
19. Some people find that they are sometimes able to ignore pain.
20. Some people find that they sometimes sit staring off into space, thinking of nothing, and are not aware of the passage of time.

0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100%  
Never Always

21. Some people sometimes find that when they are alone they talk out loud to themselves.
22. Some people find that in one situation they may act so differently compared with another situation that they feel almost as if they were different people.
23. Some people sometimes find that in certain situations they are able to do things with amazing ease and spontaneity that would usually be difficult for them (for example, sports, work, social situations, etc.).
24. Some people sometimes find that they cannot remember whether they have done something or have just thought about doing that thing (for example, not knowing whether they have just posted a letter or have just thought about posted it).
25. Some people find evidence that they have done things that they do not remember doing.
26. Some people sometimes find writings, drawings or notes among their belongings that they must have done but cannot remember doing.
27. Some people find that they sometimes hear voices inside their head that tell them to do things or comment on things that they are doing.
28. Some people sometimes feel as if they are looking at the world through a fog so that people or objects appear far away or unclear.

## **The Dissociative Profile**

The Dissociative Profile is an exercise in self-inquiry that helps us to be aware of our own tendencies to dissociate, both adaptively and maladaptively. The exercise also encourages us to develop strategies for directing our awareness back to the here and now.

Please remember that every human being dissociates. Dissociation is natural and normal. To engage in the Dissociative Profile exercise, please follow these steps:

1. Take out some paper or use the form below.
2. Make two columns. Title the left-hand column "My Dissociative Tendencies," and title the right-hand column "Strategies for Returning to the Present Moment."
3. Take as much time as you need to make a list of the ways in which you tend to dissociate—this can describe general patterns like "zoning out or daydreaming when I'm bored" or "spending too much time on Facebook wondering what everyone else is doing."
4. You can also use your answers from the DES you just completed.
5. You can take this inventory a step further by noting whether these strategies or behaviours are adaptive, maladaptive, or both (depending on context). Also perhaps note how often you engage in these dissociative strategies and whether you have knowing awareness about what triggers them (for example: boredom, emotional pain, being overwhelmed, conversations with certain people).
6. After that side of the column feels complete, go over to the right column, and beside each item on the left, make some notes about what helps you return to the present moment when you need to. These can be more intrinsic skills (for example: my mindfulness practice, especially grounding with solid objects) or more externally motivating factors (for example: hearing my child call out that they need me). Remember that this is not an interrogation; it is simply to see where you stand. You are also free to be honest and note that you are not sure yet how to draw yourself back to present-moment awareness when you get stuck in certain patterns.

<b>My dissociative tendencies</b>	<b>Strategies for returning to the present moment</b>



## **Strategies for returning to the present moment**

### **Mind**

- Make a playlist five to ten uplifting and/or grounding songs and listen to them
- Create pleasant smells by using an essential oil diffuser, scented candle or incense. Also, try using scented hand lotion.
- Find soothing things to look at such as a burning candle, soft lights, pictures of loved ones, favourite places or inspirational quotes and affirmations.
- Write down your dreams
- Journaling - keep a diary
- Complete the [TICES Worksheet](#)
- Add your own
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### **Body**

Quick exercises:

- Touch a rock or crystal
- Run an ice cube over your face
- Lick a lemon wedge
- Wrap yourself in a comfortable blanket
- Shake it off (see [Worksheet](#))



- Change the environment for a few minutes. Go outside and focus on greenery or find a soothing indoor space with a pleasant view or ambiance.
- Get grounded by moving your body mindfully. Try a short walk preferably in nature or a beautiful park or garden, taking in your surroundings mindfully with all five senses.
- Have a visual (or a sound or smell) anchor in the space you are to make contact with when overwhelmed
- Often, after upsetting news or a shock, our bodies respond by freezing and energy gets blocked. A few simple trunk twists, neck rotations, or bends at the hip to touch the toes can help shift stagnant energy.
- Treat yourself with soothing body wash or bubbles and a fresh, soft towel afterward.
- Try self-soothing touch (see [Worksheet](#)).
- Massage: follow this YouTube [link](#)
- Progressive muscle relaxation: follow this YouTube [link](#) :
- Yoga
  - Long sequence: follow this YouTube [link](#)
  - Short sequence: follow this YouTube [link](#)
  - Trauma-informed Yoga Nindra: follow this YouTube [link](#)
  - Yoga sequence (see [worksheet](#))
  - To discover more simple skills for breath work, yoga nidra, and trauma-informed physical yoga poses, go to the following [link](#)
  - Add your own
  - 
  -

## **Spirit**

- Try an app for mindfulness: Calm, Headspace
- Try self-soothing breath (see [Worksheet](#)) or count down to calmness (see [Worksheet](#))
- Reframe stress using this [YouTube video](#):
- Mindfulness: follow this [link](#)
- Speak compassionately to yourself aloud, like a good friend would. Follow this [link](#) for help
- Listen to Tara Brach talk about The RAIN of Self Compassion [here](#)
- Do a Love and Kindness meditation such as [this](#)
- Exhale more slowly than you inhale to soothe anxiety quickly. Dr. Rangan Chaterjee explains [here](#) how the 3–4–5 breathing technique works
- Add your own
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## **Social**

- Talk to a loved one/someone from your support network about dissociation and discuss a plan for helping (they reminding you of this document, suggesting exercises).
- Have a list of phone numbers for friends/ support network (peers, fellows from 12 Step meetings) who are aware of what you're going thorough and are committed to supporting you.
- Add your own
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## **Shake It Off**

The following technique can help people learn how to soothe themselves and calm the nervous system by drawing upon their own resources. Animals often shake themselves to release the excess energy produced from the stress response. In this case, this technique allows your body to connect with the trembling sensation produced by a stressful event, and enables your system to settle. Be gentle with yourself. If you find yourself experiencing distress or feeling uncomfortable while doing this exercise, you can always stop for a while and let everything settle.

### Steps:

1. Find a space where you feel comfortable and safe for shaking.
2. You can do this by either lying on the floor or standing up.
3. Let the energy move through your body as you shake your legs and feet.
4. Shake the energy off by shaking your arms and hands.
5. It might be helpful to imagine that you are shaking off the sand from your body after going to the beach.
6. Explore any other movements that might feel good for your body.
7. Come back to a resting position, sitting or lying down.
8. Use the soothing breathing technique to bring balance.

■ Levine, P. (2008). *Healing Trauma: A pioneering program for restoring the wisdom of your body*. Canada: Sounds True.



## **Self soothing touch**

The following technique can help people learn how to soothe themselves and calm the nervous system by drawing upon their own resources. In this case, this technique is about using touch to create physical and emotional soothing and calmness. Be gentle with yourself. If you find yourself experiencing distress or feeling uncomfortable while doing this exercise, you can take a few moments to take a break and let everything settle.

### **Steps:**

1. Find a comfortable and quiet space to sit in a chair or lie down on the floor.
2. Place one hand below the opposite armpit and place the other hand on top of the opposite arm, between the elbow and the shoulder, hugging yourself.
3. Draw your attention to the sensation of being contained.
4. You might want to imagine yourself hugging yourself.
5. Pay attention to the physical sensations in your body around the areas you are touching.
6. Explore the sensations on the hand under the armpit, like temperature and pressure.
7. Explore the sensations on the skin and muscles of the arm being hugged by the other hand.
8. Explore the sensations of feeling your arms across the chest.
9. Connect to the emotional experience this creates within you, maybe you feel safe and contained.
10. Keep exploring your physical and emotional experience, connecting to the pleasant sensations that arise.

■ Levine, P. (2008). *Healing Trauma: A pioneering program for restoring the wisdom of your body*. Canada: Sounds True.

## **Countdown to Calmness**

When we ground ourselves, we are more able to use our wise mind to radically accept things as they are, rather than desperately trying to change them. This exercise combines counting down from 5 while using your senses in a mindful way. Write your observations in the spaces provided below:

5. Acknowledge **5 things you see around you.**
  
4. Acknowledge **4 things you can touch/feel around you.**
  
3. Acknowledge **3 sounds around you.**
  
2. Acknowledge **2 things you can smell around you.**
  
1. Acknowledge **1 thing you can currently taste.**

## **Soothing Breath**

The following technique can help people learn how to soothe themselves and calm the nervous system by drawing upon their own resources. This technique uses breath and touch to help to soothe the body and the mind. Be gentle with yourself. If you find yourself experiencing distress or feeling uncomfortable while doing this exercise, you can always stop for a break and let everything settle.

### **Steps:**

1. Find a comfortable and quiet space to sit in a chair or lie down on the floor.
2. Start by finding a comfortable position, either sitting on a chair or lying down.
3. Place one hand on top of the belly and the other on top of the chest.
4. While breathing normally, focus your attention on your breath.
5. Feel the hands resting on top of your torso and explore how they move, rising and falling as you breathe in and out.
6. Feel the warmth of your hands and explore what other sensations arise in your body.
7. Gently try to soften and deepen your breath, allowing the belly and chest to expand freely.
8. As you continue, pay attention to the emotional sensations that you might experience.

■ Levine, P. (2008). *Healing Trauma: A pioneering program for restoring the wisdom of your body*. Canada: Sounds True.



## **Yoga- Inspired Sequence for Reducing Distress and Nightmares**

The following sequence can be used when dissociating, preventatively or after waking up from a vivid nightmare. A similar sequence may also prove useful if someone is navigating a craving or urge.

**Energy Flicking:** Spend a few minutes releasing any tension from the body and set an intention to send it away from the body and down to the ground. You can do jumping jacks, run in place, dance, or, quite simply, flick your hands and fingers down toward the ground as if you are dispelling unwanted stress or energy. Do this as long as it feels appropriate. If working with a craving component, this aspect will likely need to be engaged in longer.

**Straw Breathing:** Come into a seated position. You can sit on the floor, in a chair, or on your bed. Lying down can also be appropriate if this is where you are ending the sequence. If you are going to proceed with the yoga poses that follow, stay seated for this breath sequence. Keeping your eyes closed or open, inhale through the nose. Do not force a deep, heavy breath—just go to that place where it feels like your stomach is expanding and you're getting a good breath. On the exhale, pucker your lips as if you are about to blow out through a straw. Try this three times to start with, then resume normal breathing and check in with how you are feeling. If it feels appropriate for you to attempt more sets, do another another six to ten sets, and then continue on until you feel sufficiently still to fall asleep or move onto the yoga poses.

**Suggested Yoga Pose I (Seated Forward Fold):** Any time you bend the body forward and release the head into a fold, the reverse of blood flow can create a pleasant response in the body that may help with relaxation or sleep. Start with a basic, seated forward fold. You can keep your legs together in front of you or separate them slightly. On an inhale, raise the arms overhead, and then on an exhale, fold forward. You do not have to touch your feet. Let the hands rest where they naturally meet your legs on the fold forward. What is most important is that you tuck your chin in toward your chest. Take about three to four breaths into the forward fold and then slowly lift yourself out of it. Notice whatever you notice. Repeat as many times as feels appropriate.

**Suggested Yoga Pose II (Legs Up the Wall):** This next pose is one of the most powerful for potentially helping you to fall asleep, fall back to sleep, or to ease yourself after a panic attack. It is possibly contraindicated if you are pregnant or menstruating. Come to sit against the wall with your right or left hip against the wall (your choice). Then, using your hands and arms to support you as appropriate, swing the body toward the wall and let your legs rest against the wall so that your body is in an L shape. Keeping your buttocks as close as possible to the wall is recommended, although feel free to move further away from the wall if you need a gentler stretch. Although staying in this stretch together with gentle, mindful breathing for 3 to 4 minutes is recommended, any time you can spend in this position is helpful. If putting the legs up the wall feels like too much, you can use a chair variation. Lying on your back, manoeuvre your body so that your calves are resting on the chair and you are looking up toward your feet. In this variation, your legs are making the L shape, not the entire body.

With any of these physical yoga poses, feel free to use a pillow, blankets, cushions, or a yoga mat if it will make you feel more comfortable. If your clients are nervous about engaging in any kind of physical movement, encourage them to consult with their physician.

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**Notes:**

