
ADHD & RSD

**Living with ADHD and
Rejection Sensitive
Dysphoria (RSD)**

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When people think of ADHD, they often picture distraction, hyperactivity, or bursts of humour and creativity. But for many of us, ADHD carries something far less visible and far more painful: Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD).

RSD isn't an official diagnosis, but it's a very real experience for people with ADHD. It describes the extreme emotional pain that comes with rejection, criticism, or even the perception of failure. It doesn't take much — a comment, a look, or silence — and suddenly it feels like devastation, humiliation, or rage. Many describe it as “emotional flooding,” because the reaction hits instantly and intensely.

What RSD Looks Like in ADHD

Because ADHD brains process emotions differently, rejection or criticism cuts much deeper. It often shows up as:

- Avoiding risks to escape possible rejection**
- People-pleasing or masking to fit in**
- Angry outbursts or complete shutdown**
- Low self-esteem reinforced by years of negative feedback**

For me, RSD feels like constantly flipping between “everything is fine” and “everyone hates everything I do” — sometimes multiple times in a single day. It’s exhausting.

Behind the Mask

I know I come across as confident, outgoing, even funny. But much of that is a mask. The truth is, I live in a cycle of chasing control through perfectionism, triggered by old wounds of being the “too smart, too much, uncontrollable” kid who became the embarrassment of the family.

That history still echoes. Every time I achieve something, I’m proud for a moment — then terrified someone will notice I’m a fraud. That’s the daily tug-of-war of ADHD life: balancing pride with fear, humour with shame, confidence with fragility.

Coping with RSD

Like all mental health challenges, sometimes nothing helps — and that in itself can be discouraging. But there are tools that can make it lighter:

- Awareness: Naming RSD reduces shame. It's not being dramatic; it's a brain-based reaction.**
- Therapy: CBT, DBT, and trauma-informed approaches help regulate emotional responses.**
- Medication: ADHD medications — and in some cases other treatments — can reduce the intensity of RSD.**
- Supportive relationships: Being around people who truly understand makes the pain easier to bear.**

Why do I talk about the worst parts?

No one told me the bad parts, I NEVER want a single person to ever experience the life I had. I was so isolated, so alone and so unwell for a long period of time.

This is why I am so passionate about what I can do today to make the world better. Create access to treatment, removing stigma, and educating others about ADHD.

HOWEVER - I'm not just "sarcastic funny Jess with great shoes." I am that 100%— but I'm also someone who, if pushed far enough, could easily break down and fall into pieces. That honesty and awareness matters.

Last week I was told to be mindful of my sense of humour. Unfortunately, its who I am so its not easy nor possible, and because of that I will feel I'm failing every day and like everyone is judging me when I make them laugh and feel very exposed and fragile.

It's dark side effect of ADHD that's not spoken about enough.

Everyone experiences ADHD and RSD differently, but by sharing openly, I hope people begin to understand just how deeply this condition affects our daily lives — and why compassion, awareness, and access to proper support are so important.

By signing this petition you are creating a walkway to ADHD support currently blocked by Profits before care, stigma and assumptions.

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/petitions/train-gps-to-diagnose-and-treat-adhd>



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