



The ADD-vantage
Specialist ADHD support services
Great minds think alike, brilliant minds think differently

A GUIDE FOR YOU & THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE YOU

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria

RSD is a recognised feature of ADHD, not a character flaw or weakness.

Understanding it is the first step — for you, and for the people in your corner.

💛 What is it ?

"It feels like the world is ending — even when I know, logically, it probably isn't."

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) is an intense, overwhelming emotional response to perceived or actual rejection, criticism or the sense that you've disappointed someone. The word *dysphoria* literally means an unbearable state of unease.

With RSD, the emotional pain is immediate, extreme, and feels completely real — because it *is* real. It's not drama or overreaction. It's a neurological experience that can feel like a physical wave crashing through your whole body.

🧠 Why does it happen with ADHD?

Brain wiring

ADHD affects emotional regulation in the brain. The parts that put the brakes on intense emotions work differently. Emotions hit harder & faster, before you can process them.

A lifetime of feedback

Growing up with ADHD often means more criticism, correction, and moments of feeling "too much" or "not enough." The nervous system learns to be hyper-alert to those signals.

No off switch

Neurotypical people can usually reason their way through hurt feelings. With RSD, the emotional brain fires so fast that the logical brain can't catch up in time.

It's not your personality

RSD is a *symptom*, not a character flaw. It doesn't mean you're weak, dramatic, or broken. It means your nervous system is wired differently.

⚡ What can trigger it?

Even small things can set it off — and it's often about *perception*, not what happened.

A short or blunt text reply
Someone sounding annoyed
Not getting a response
Making a mistake
Sensing a shift in someone's mood,
A cancelled plan

Criticism at work or school
A joke that lands wrong
Feeling like you've disappointed someone
Being talked over
Perceived teasing
Being left out

What I need from the people around me

Don't tell me I'm overreacting

Even if it seems small to you, the pain is completely real to me in that moment. Saying "it's not a big deal" shuts me down and makes me feel more ashamed, not less upset.

Just say it clearly — don't leave me to guess

Vague messages, unanswered texts, or a weird vibe with no explanation will send my brain into overdrive. A simple "I'm fine, just tired" goes a long way.

Give me reassurance, even if it feels obvious

When I'm in an RSD spiral, I need to hear that we're okay, that you're not angry, that I haven't ruined everything — even if it seems unnecessary to say out loud.

Let me feel it without fixing it immediately

Sometimes I just need a minute to ride the wave. Don't panic. It's intense, but it will pass. Sitting with me (literally or emotionally) helps more than jumping into solutions.

Deliver feedback kindly, not bluntly

I genuinely want to know if I've done something wrong — I just need it wrapped in context. "I know you didn't mean to, but..." makes it possible to hear. Cold or clipped feedback can feel like an attack.

Don't take it personally when I pull away

When RSD hits, my first instinct might be to go quiet, disappear, or shut down. It's protective, not punishing. Give me space without letting me feel abandoned.

What doesn't help

"You're so sensitive." — I know. That's the point. It's not a choice.

"You need to toughen up." — RSD isn't a habit I can practice away with willpower.

Giving me the silent treatment — Uncertainty and distance are RSD's worst enemies.

Sighing, eye rolls, or dismissive body language — I pick up on everything, and I'll assume the worst.

Bringing up a lot of issues at once — Stack it all together and I'll feel like I'm a problem, not a person.

Remind yourself, when it hits:

"This feeling is real — but it will pass. It always does."

"My reaction makes sense given how my brain is wired."

"I am not too much. I feel deeply, and that's not a flaw."