Dear Alice,

I have a "tendency to dissociate." Some of my memories are very distinct. Much of last year seems very vague. I keep thinking experiences from the 2002-3 school year were from 2004-5. In addition, I often find myself talking to myself in the second person ("you"). Does this mean I have multiple personality disorder?

? Frightened of who I may be

Answer

Dear Frightened of who I may be,

Like most people's memories, some of your memories are more or less clear than others. You also say you confuse chronological order of experiences and talk with yourself while addressing yourself as "you." While it's difficult to say whether you have multiple personality disorder from this information alone, it might help you to know more about the disorder.

Multiple personality disorder is now called Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). DID is one of several dissociative disorders. All of these disorders are marked by major disturbance in how a person's memory, identity, perception, and consciousness mesh together. To diagnose this DID, two symptoms must be present:

1. A person experiences at least two distinct identities or personality states that take control of the person's behavior.
2. The person's identity seems fragmented because s/he is unable to recall very personal bits of information about his/her actual identity.

People living with DID seem to switch between at least two identity/personality states. These states can vary in gender, age, mannerisms, etc. Often, a feeling of stress precedes the "switch" to a different state.

Research and clinical experience suggest that many people living with DID have experienced intensely stressful emotional and/or physical events known as trauma. People who experience trauma sometimes cope with the stress by mentally dissociating (intentionally or unintentionally pretending to be in another place, time, body, etc.) while the trauma is occurring. This can lead to forgetting parts of events or entire events (dissociative amnesia). Although DID is a rare psychological disorder, many people experience symptoms of
dissociation and memory loss or confusion without meeting the criteria for DID.

You point to confusion or lack of clarity and chronological order during 2003-2005. What types of experiences did you have during that time? If you experienced any trauma, how have you coped with it? Are there certain situations when you are more likely to talk to yourself as "you"? Aside from what you wrote, what else leads you to question whether you might be experiencing DID? For instance, have others told you that you switch into different personality states?

How would you feel about speaking with a mental health professional about your concerns? Your provider will likely want to know if you have any history of trauma. Also, s/he should try to rule out any organic brain processes or brain injury, which may sometimes explain the symptoms that you describe. Your school health system or health insurance company should be able to point you in the direction of a mental health professional. If you do not have health insurance, you may want to look into community mental health centers. Also, health care providers can be good referral sources.

It's important that you see someone to check out your situation. After a careful evaluation, you should be pointed toward appropriate care for your symptoms, whether or not you're living with DID.

With support,

Alice!

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