



SA Federation for
Mental Health

PERSONALITY DISORDERS

AVOIDANT PERSONALITY DISORDER

What it is:

Avoidant personality disorder is characterised by a persistent pattern of social inhibition, hypersensitivity to negative criticism and feelings of inadequacy. This behaviour typically begins to manifest in early adulthood, and can be visible in a variety of ways. Individuals with avoidant personality disorder will actively try to avoid situations in a social or work context in which they fear there is chance of rejection, disapproval or criticism. They will also typically avoid making new acquaintances or friends unless they feel certain of being liked and accepted without the possibility of criticism. Individuals with avoidant personality disorder often find it difficult to form intimate relationships, as they assume other people to always be critical or disapproving. They may also act very restrained in relationships, withholding feelings and not talking about themselves for fear of ridicule.

Individuals with avoidant personality disorder are typically extremely sensitive to any kind of criticism, and can be deeply hurt from comments or observations that others may consider to be trivial or insignificant. Their behaviour also tends to indicate low self-esteem, and be shy, withdrawn, quiet or inhibited. Individuals with avoidant personality disorder are prone to exaggerate the potential dangers of any situation, and as a result they may lead a restricted lifestyle. Their fear of criticism and negative evaluations may lead to serious impairments in personal relationships and their occupations.

Common symptoms:

1. Social inhibition, shyness, or self-consciousness
2. Avoiding occupational activities that involve close interaction with others, because of a fear of criticism, rejection or embarrassment
3. The individual is unwilling to form personal relationships unless they are certain of being liked
4. Showing restraint in personal relationships due to a fear of being shamed or teased
5. An obsessive fear of criticism or rejection in social situations
6. Reluctant to engage or participate in any form of new activity due to fear of embarrassment



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Causes:

Avoidant personality disorder has been found to occur with a number of different mental disorders. These include bipolar and depressive disorders, and anxiety disorders, especially social anxiety. It can also occur with different personality disorders, such as dependent personality disorder, paranoid personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder.