

# Living in a Fog: Working with Dissociation and Dissociative Disorder



*Facilitated by Christiane Sanderson*

*One in Four Trustee and expert in Child  
Sexual Abuse, Domestic Abuse and Trauma*

**Date: Saturday 20th November**

**Time: 10.00am—4.00pm**

**Venue: ZOOM**

**Cost: £50**

**Book via Eventbrite**

Dissociation is a highly adaptive survival strategy in the presence of systematic and prolonged abuse characteristic of child sexual abuse (CSA) and domestic violence. In the presence of repeated traumatic experiences in which there is no escape, dissociation becomes the default setting making it hard to remain present in the body. As a result many survivors of CSA, rape and domestic abuse numb all affect, disconnect from or delete their body and retreat into their head. This can lead to a range of symptoms which are currently subsumed under subtype Post Traumatic Stress Disorder with Prominent Dissociative Symptoms. To fully understand the role of dissociation in complex trauma it is essential to understand the psychobiological mechanisms that underpin peritraumatic dissociation through the release of a cascade of neurochemicals and the disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity and perception which are the core features of secondary dissociation and structural dissociation, and how these produce the dissociative states, and symptoms seen in Dissociative Disorders, Dissociative Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (DDNOS) and Other Specified Dissociative Disorder (OSDD).

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Many survivors are not aware of the signs or symptoms of dissociation making it imperative that clinicians are able to link client experiences of 'living in a fog', 'wading through mud', 'sieve like memory' and 'feeling as through someone else is in control' to dissociative states. Most importantly, identifying clues to dissociation such as distortions in time, perception and memory, changes in verbal and non-verbal communication, bodily sensations and cognitive processing, as well as depersonalisation and derealisation, are crucial to helping survivors understand the symptoms of dissociation and how to manage these more effectively. In addition, clinicians need to be aware of their own capacity for dissociation when bearing witness to traumatic experiences and the impact of somatic countertransference in order to remain present with survivors of complex trauma.

Emphasis will be placed on what dissociation looks like in practice and how to translate survivors reports of their experiencing of the world into clinical formulation of dissociation and how this can best be managed in the therapeutic setting.

Christiane Sanderson is a senior lecturer in Psychology at the University of Roehampton. . With over 35 years' experience working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse interpersonal trauma and domestic abuse. She has run consultancy and training for parents, teachers, social workers, nurses, therapists, counselors, solicitors, the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Committee, the Methodist Church, the Metropolitan Police Service, the NSPCC and the Refugee Council and in prisons. She is the author of *Counselling Skills for Working with Shame*, *Counselling Skills for Working with Trauma: Healing from Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Violence and Domestic Abuse*, *Introduction of Counselling Survivors of Interpersonal Trauma*, *Counselling Survivors of Domestic Abuse*, *Counselling Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, *The Seduction of Children: Empowering Parents and Teachers to Protect Children from Child Sexual Abuse* all published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers and *The Warrior Within: A One in Four Handbook to Aid Recovery from Childhood Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence*, *The Spirit Within: A One in Four Handbook to Aid Recovery from Religious Sexual Abuse Across All Faiths*, *Responding to Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: A pocket guide for professionals, partners, families and friends* and *Numbing the Pain: A pocket guide for professionals supporting survivors of childhood sexual abuse and addiction* all published by One in Four.

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