When I was young, around 6th grade, I started listening to music while laying down for hours at a time. I would just daydream, the topic was very…dark. I was the star of the day dream and my character was kidnapped and put into human trafficking. She would constantly be raped, tortured, humiliated, and dehumanized and this went on for years. Any moment I could I would slip into this world and the character suffered more and more abuse. It seeped into my dreams and scared me. I did not like this place, but couldn’t stop. Eventually the character was no longer me, my name and face stopped being used. But for all intent and purposes it kinda was still me.

Characters from tv shows and books were in here, typically they’d fall into danger and my character would have to suffer in some way to protect them. While I don’t have the time to simply lay around all day anymore, I still visit this place, although not quite intentionally? This is the only world I’ve imagined, although it does have different time lines I guess.

This started as a way to get away from my life. My family was dysfunctional, neglectful, emotionally abusive, and I was under constant stress. I was a parentified child to my twin sister and mother. So maybe this is some dissociative issue? Idk what it is but it still bothers me and I can’t talk to anyone about it. I have no idea how to bring it up to a therapist, or what kind of therapist to see for it. While my life’s gotten better I still daydream, and it gets in the way of my school work sometimes. I’ll drift into this world if I’m feeling depressed and don’t want to deal with my emotions.

Basically I need help finding help, what kind of therapist should I see for this? How do I even begin to tell them about it? And is there any clue as to what this could even be? Am I crazy?

A. You began daydreaming to escape your chaotic life. You utilized the term maladaptive daydreaming and while it is not an officially recognized diagnostic label, there are empirical studies that describe it as a observable phenomenon. Maladaptive daydreaming is distressful often because it produces negative emotions which can hinder social, occupational and academic performance. Daydreaming is a normal mental activity that is virtually universal. Maladaptive daydreaming, however, is less common and often indicative of psychological distress. In some studies, individuals who engaged in maladaptive daydreaming had higher rates of obsessive-compulsive symptoms and dissociation when compared to control subjects.

It’s possible that your maladaptive daydreaming is a form of dissociation or derealization. In that case, it would be important to learn grounding techniques to decrease these experiences and psychological strategies for dealing with reality. These can be learned in counseling.
Therapists will not think that you are “crazy.” They don’t think that way about their clients. Most therapists will know how to help you but it might be advantageous to choose one who specializes in dissociative disorders. The literature suggests that individuals with maladaptive daydreaming may benefit from cognitive behavioral therapies, exposure and response prevention therapies, mindfulness training, and perhaps hypnosis.

Generally speaking, the best way to find a therapist is to contact four or five and describe your symptoms and ask how they would help. Choose the therapist who is the most knowledgeable and with whom you feel the most comfortable. They will likely be your best choice. I hope this answer assists you in knowing how to proceed. Good luck and please take care.

Dr. Kristina Randle

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