Maladaptive Daydreaming Top Triggers And Risk Factors: How To Know If You’re Addicted To Daydreaming

By Dana Dovey

Everyone loves to daydream, but according to some experts, when this daydreaming occurs the majority of your day and starts to interfere with your ability to function normally, it may be classified as an actual mental health condition known as maladaptive daydreaming. Here’s how to know if you’re addictive to daydreaming, and the top triggers and risk factors for this addictive behavior.

It’s important to be clear that daydreaming is nothing to be worried about. It’s not only normal, it’s actually really healthy. According to Psychology Today, as many as 96 percent of adults engage in at least one bout of daily fantasies. Although it’s not entirely clear as to why we daydream, many psychologists suggest that the behavior helps to give our brains a workout, making them ready to spring into action when we need to attend to an outside stimulus.

However, Eli Somer, a clinical professor of psychology at the University of Haifa in Israel, believes extreme daydreaming should be considered a mental disorder, The Wall Street Journal reported.

SIGNS OF MALADAPTIVE DAYDREAMING

In his research, Somer found that one of the most defining features of maladaptive daydreamers was the amount of time they spent on their daydreams. For example, according to The WSJ, maladaptive daydreamers engaged in daydreaming on average 57 percent of their waking time compared with 16 percent in the control group.

In addition, maladaptive daydreamers also had different types of daydreams. For example, according to Somer, they often had more elaborate and fanciful daydreams, often involving fictional or historical figures, celebrities or idealized versions of themselves. In contrast, the control group’s daydreams centered around events in real life or concrete wishes, such as winning the lottery, The WSJ reported.
Maladaptive daydreamers also often had more underlying mental health condition, such as higher rates of attention-deficit and obsessive–compulsive symptoms. In addition, more than 80 percent used activity or movement when daydreaming, such as rocking, pacing or spinning.

However, the single most defining feature of maladaptive daydreaming may be its interference with the dreamer's waking life. For example, Rachel Bennett, a 27-year-old Jacksonville, N.C. resident told The WSJ: “I'd much rather stay home and daydream than go out.”

TRIGGERS/RISK FACTORS

While daydreamers are likely to dream at any point in their waking life, there are certain triggers and factors that can increase your risk of developing maladaptive daydreaming. For example, some cite music or being alone and bored as a trigger to start their daydreaming. Somer reported that maladaptive daydreamers are more likely to have a history of trauma or abuse, for which they may use daydreaming to escape from. In addition, maladaptive daydreamers are also more likely to have a family history of mental health disorders, such as OCD.

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