

## **Adjustment Disorder**

**Definition:** An array of stress-induced syndromes that occur within 3 months after exposure to a distressing (traumatic or non-traumatic) event, such as marital or financial conflict in adults, family conflict, school problems, death of a family member, sexuality issues in an adolescent. Unlike Major Depression, Adjustment Disorder is due to an outside stressor and generally resolves within 6 months once the individual is able to adapt to the situation. This disorder can equally affect men and women of all ages.

**Symptoms:** Emotional signs of an Adjustment Disorder include: sadness, hopelessness, lack of enjoyment, crying, insomnia, nervousness, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed and thoughts of suicide. Behavioral signs of an Adjustment Disorder include: reckless driving, fighting, avoiding family and friends, ignoring important tasks like bill paying or homework, and skipping school.

**Causes:** A stressor is generally an event of a serious, unusual nature that an individual or group of individuals experience. The stressors that cause adjustment disorders may be grossly traumatic or relatively minor, like loss of a girlfriend/boyfriend, a poor report card, or moving to a new neighborhood. It is thought that the more chronic or recurrent the stressor, the more likely it is to produce an adjustment disorder. Those exposed to repeated trauma are at greater risk, even if that trauma is in the distant past. Age can be a factor due to young children having fewer coping resources; children are also less likely to assess the consequences of a potential stressor.

**Treatment:** Usually, the recommended treatment for Adjustment Disorder is psychotherapy. The goal of psychotherapy is symptom relief and behavior change. Treatment allows the individual to put his/her distress or rage into words instead of destructive actions. Support groups can also be helpful since the group shares the same stressor. Sometimes a limited dose of medication is used mainly to manage anxiety or insomnia. In addition to professional help, parents can help their child better adjust by offering encouragement to talk about their emotions, offering support, reassuring the child that their reaction is normal, involving the child's teacher to check on progress at school, allowing the child to make simple decisions at home, and involving the child in an outside activity which they enjoy.