

Episode 12: Autism and Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria

Overview

In this mini-episode Jeanne (she/her) talks about rejection sensitive dysphoria and how the way we view and treat autistic behaviors in childhood can have lifelong impacts on their sense of self-worth and relationships to others.

Key Points:

- Rejection sensitive dysphoria is a condition that is most commonly associated with ADHD but is also frequently seen in autistics. The exact causes are unclear, but it is thought to be caused by a combination of neurological differences plus bullying/criticism faced by neurodivergent children. People with RSD are highly sensitive to what others think about them and can have disproportionately strong negative reactions to real or perceived social rejection.

- Time: 27:01

Quotes:

“RSD can manifest as extreme panic, rage, embarrassment, shame, and/or hopelessness at only minor social rejections like turning down an invitation or not responding to a text, reading too much into statements and thinking others are upset at you, or constant concerns that others secretly dislike you even if they seem to be completely nice in their interactions with you.”

“Your brain learns from all of its past experiences, and unfortunately most neurodivergent children have a long history of having people treat their mannerisms of excitement as rudeness, of being blamed for being bullied because “what did you expect when you look/act like that,” of people insulting them for the way their brain works to process information, and of parents, teachers, and therapists saying that if the child doesn’t change then no one will like them or

they will not be successful - what else can a child take from this other than “I must be wrong?””

“if a variety of trusted adults repeatedly tell a child, often with the intent to help them, that people find them annoying, that the child is playing wrong, that no one will like them if they don’t make eye contact, that their brain will internalize deeply that they as a person are wrong and annoying, and they must constantly be on the look-out for signs that they are annoying others?”

“This is one of the reasons I and other autistics have so many concerns with existing social skills training - if you start from a position that the child’s natural ways to communicate, play, think, and move are “wrong” it teaches permanent negative thoughts and makes them work so much harder to function.”

Articles Referenced:

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