



# PODS

Partners of Dissociative Survivors

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>>> PODS: Support for people whose partners, friends or family members suffer from a dissociative disorder

NEWSLETTER — NOV 2010

## Rob's Report

We were doing some research recently for our PODS workshop and came across a couple of statistics which surprised us and then, when they had really sunk in, shocked us. The Sidran institute ([www.sidran.org](http://www.sidran.org)) estimate that 1% of the population has DID. And a community study in 2006 by Johnson *et al* estimates that 1.5% of the UK population has DID, and a further 3.5-4.5% suffer from a dissociative disorder. Based on there being at least 60 million people in this country, that would mean that there are somewhere in the region of 1,000,000 people in the UK with DID, and maybe a further 4 million with a dissociative disorder. Rare? I don't think so! I'm kind of hoping that not everyone has a partner who phones the helpline as I may be a little overloaded, but it really does flag up the scale of the problem.

The big issue that people who contact PODS hit on repeatedly is that of diagnosis and treatment, and the options on the NHS. Remy Aquarone at the Pottergate Centre ([www.dissociation.co.uk](http://www.dissociation.co.uk)) is doing a fantastic job around the country trying to persuade Primary Care Trusts to fund appropriate treatment, but on the whole the bad news is that trying to twist the right treatment out of the NHS is generally a no-hoper. A lot of people seem very concerned to get an actual diagnosis from a psychiatrist and think that pursuing this is the means to treatment. However I often come back to the point that the treatment of choice according to the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation ([www.isst-d.org](http://www.isst-d.org)) is long-term one-to-one relational psychotherapy. To access this, you don't need an 'official' diagnosis—you just need the means to pay and a therapist who is willing to work with you. Admittedly, both of these are often 'impossibles' but I always encourage people to keep trying. The PODS website has a list of helpful organisations that might be able to put you in touch with someone who you can help, even at reduced rates, but one of the key directions in which PODS is going is training and informing counsellors who have never (knowingly) worked with it before so they are able and willing to do so. We are now running a number of introductory workshops and we can then pass people on to more in-depth training, for example with the UK training arm of the European Society for Trauma and Dissociation ([www.estd.org](http://www.estd.org)).

Certainly we would do a lot more if we had the time and the resources—so if anyone knows of anyone in the Cambridgeshire area who is skilled in administration (anything from book-keeping to updating websites) and is willing to volunteer for a few hours a week, please do put them in touch with us. Everything we do is funded out of our own pocket and with the income from workshops and training days, so if anyone knows a businessman/woman, benefactor or millionaire who would like to fund our work, please send them our way!

One of our aims for the future is to raise awareness through lobbying Parliament to get dissociative disorders put on the political map, and there are a couple of potential options opening up for us in this regard. As Valerie Sinason said at the TAG Conference in 2009, the lack of treatment for DID and ritual abuse survivors is a national disgrace. Certainly there is 'dissociation about dissociation' and the NHS and government have almost entirely split off from awareness of it. We want to raise that awareness and campaign at the highest levels to get appropriate treatment for people with DID, provided and funded by the NHS. In the meantime we also want to set up a charity fund that will pay for the very expensive private psychiatric assessments that are often required before the NHS can be persuaded to provide ANY help.

A million people with DID and a further 3-4 million with a dissociative disorder ... the scale of the problem is staggering, and survivors deserve a better deal than they are currently receiving. PODS is all about raising awareness so that more people can 'partner' with survivors on their road to recovery — being a 'partner' is not limited to being a spouse or 'civil partner'; it's all about people who will come alongside, and that can also mean a supporter, a friend, a professional (counsellor, Community Psychiatric Nurse, GP), or even an organisation.

So please help and 'partner' with us by telling people about PODS: about our website, our resources, our workshops and Open Days, and our helpline.

Many thanks  
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If this newsletter has been forwarded to you from someone else and you would like to join our mailing list, please go to [www.pods-online.org.uk/newsletter](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/newsletter) to sign up, or email us.

## Workshop Report — 9 October 2010: “Living with Dissociation”

On Saturday 9 October 2010 we hosted the first of our new-format PODS event with a workshop entitled 'Living with Dissociation'. Over the last 12 months, PODS has grown and evolved. After an article by Rob in September 2009 in *Interact*, the journal of TAG ([www.tag-uk.net](http://www.tag-uk.net)), we had a steady flow of contacts, predominantly from partners of dissociative survivors. Some of these contacts met together on one of our 3 Open Meetings, where we connected, shared, and provided a place of support for one another. However, circumstances have brought many other people towards PODS and we started to hear the message repeatedly that lots of people were wanting a more structured event in which specific material could be covered. Many people, including survivors and counsellors, are wanting to find out more about dissociation and DID in particular. So we decided to hold a PODS workshop entitled 'Living with Dissociation' and make it open to a wider audience.

We were overwhelmed by the response! By mid-September we had to stop taking bookings as over 60 people had said they were coming. Many other people had to be turned away due the size limitations of our venue. This has spoken to us about the need for more information about DID and dissociative disorders in this country.

So on Saturday 9 October 2010 we were host to:

- Approximately 20 counsellors, some of whom had experience in working with dissociation, but many who were just interested and wanted to know more
- Approximately 40 survivors and/or their partners or supporters

People came from as far afield as Wales, the South Coast and both the north-west and the north-east. We delivered three formal teaching sessions in which spoke about the prevalence, logic and helpfulness of dissociation and DID as a very natural and essential response to overwhelming trauma. I talked about my experience and perspective as a partner – both the difficulties and the joys – and Carolyn spoke about life as it was 5 years ago compared to life now. We also taught about the brain and how different parts of the brain relate to triggers and traumatic stress. This was a very helpful and practical session, giving strategies to cope with strategies and how to bring yourself back into your 'window of tolerance' by grounding and using the different parts of our brain. We also talked about the role of secure

attachments and how they play a vital part in healing. Although the subject matter was quite serious, we modelled using humour as a coping resource, which was apparently well received!

For the fourth and final session we split up into two groups. Survivors and partners / supporters met together with me to share and chat about their experiences of living with DID, while counsellors and other professionals met together with Carolyn to hear more explicitly about her story and her road to healing. In my group there were some interesting discussions, but I was delighted to hear someone's comment that they had never been somewhere before where they had felt so accepted to have DID.

The time flew by! It was a very 'safe' environment in which we tried as much as possible to talk about our issues in a non-triggering and sensitive way. It was also a very relaxed day in which people felt able to network, chat with each other and share as much as they wanted to.

Almost two thirds of the delegates completed an evaluation to feedback to us their thoughts of the day. It was very moving to read through them (lots of 10/10!). A recurrent word that was used was 'hope'. This was so encouraging to us – one of our aims of the day was to impart the hope of recovery. And another aim was to show that relationships can not just survive, but actually improve and be part of the solution to overcoming the trauma that has caused the difficulties in the first place. Our personal story of trauma and abuse, breakdowns and post-traumatic stress resonated with many people there, and we wanted to share the journey of hope that we as a couple have been travelling.

The next PODS workshop on 19 February 2011 will be a repeat of the first as we know that many people who could not attend in October will be keen to come, as well as many others. More details are available on the website: [www.pods-online.org.uk/events.html](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/events.html). We will also be repeating the day on 9 April 2011 in Preston following numerous requests to run it in that part of the country. Please pass the details on to anyone you know who may benefit from it.

Next year we will be running a series of follow-up days looking in more detail at issues such as denial, shame and attachment – our next newsletter will hopefully contain details and dates.

## PODS Open Meeting — 4 December 2010

We are holding an Open Meeting in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire on **4 December 2010** from 1.30 pm to 5.30 pm. This meeting is open to anyone with a dissociative disorder and their partners. It will not be a taught session (unlike our workshops) but will be a 'support group' type meeting where people can come together to talk through issues and share information and experiences. It will be facilitated by Rob, and Carolyn will also be attending. Pre-booking is essential—we are making a charge of £15.00 per person just to cover our costs, and numbers will be limited. Go to the website for more details and a booking form or to book online: [www.pods-online.org.uk/events.html](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/events.html).

# Workshops and Training Days

## “Living with Dissociation” PODS Workshop

in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29

on **Saturday 19 February 2011**, 9.30 am — 5.30 pm  
and

in Preston, Lancashire, PR1

on **Saturday 9 April 2011**, 9.30 am — 5.30 pm

The last session (from 3.30 pm) is a support group / open meeting for survivors and partners, and a separate Q&A session for counsellors and therapists

### WHO IS IT FOR?

- Anyone suffering from a dissociative disorder or experiencing dissociation
- Survivors of sexual abuse or trauma
- Partners, friends, family members of dissociative survivors
- Counsellors, therapists, Rape Crisis staff, helpline volunteers
- Community Psychiatric Nurses, GPs, other health professionals
- Social Workers, Family Workers, other social care staff

### COURSE OVERVIEW

**Session 1:** *Understanding Dissociation and Dissociative Identity Disorder*

**Session 2:** *What is it like being DID?*

**Session 3:** *Coping and recovering from dissociative disorders*

### COST

- £40.00 per person, or £60.00 for a couple (survivor plus partner, survivor plus supporter, or partner plus supporter)
- Drinks and biscuits will be provided but please bring your own lunch (sandwich shops also located nearby).

### BOOKING

- Please fill in a booking form (available at [www.pods-online.org.uk/PODS-February2011Workshop.pdf](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/PODS-February2011Workshop.pdf)) and send together with a cheque made payable to 'TASC' to PO Box 633, HUNTINGDON, Cambridgeshire, PE29 9GJ
- Alternatively you may book online at [www.pods-online.org.uk](http://www.pods-online.org.uk) and pay via credit/debit card or Paypal.

## “Dissociation, Trauma and Time-Travelling ... or Living and Working with Dissociative Identity Disorder”

a joint Deep Release & TASC Training Day  
with Hazel Barton, Jane Potts & Carolyn Spring

**Saturday 12 February 2011**, 9.00 am — 4.00 pm  
Haven House, Hemel Hempstead, HP3 9AB

**£50.00 per person**

Suitable for counsellors, therapists, survivors, partners, pastoral workers, Rape Crisis Centre staff, and anyone else interested or involved in the field of sexual abuse, trauma and dissociation

### COURSE OVERVIEW

Carolyn Spring worked therapeutically with children for nearly ten years. And then all of a sudden, at the peak of her career, she had an unexpected and debilitating breakdown. From working as a professional in a multi-agency team, she suddenly found herself unable to sleep, eat, think or work. At times she was barely able to speak, and when she did so it was in a four-year-old's voice, pleading not to be hurt. She began what felt like a series of 'time-travels', back into the past, then suddenly forwards again into the present. She would realise that she was miles from home, with no memory of how she had got there. She felt like she was stepping in and out of the TARDIS in *Doctor Who*.

What had happened? Had she gone mad? Where had the competent professional gone, and was this regressed child-adult here to stay? Could she get better? What would happen to her?

That was over five years ago. Carolyn is now walking down a path of increasing healing, having been diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder as a result of extreme childhood sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Using her story as a basis, and expanding out into the experiences from 'the other side' of two leading therapists, this training day will explore the mechanisms of dissociation and DID, the effect of trauma on the body and brain, the reality and therapeutic minefields of disorganised attachment, and how healing and recovery can be possible through appropriate therapeutic work.

The training will be led by Hazel Barton and Dr Jane Potts, two therapists experienced in the field of trauma and dissociation, as well as by Carolyn herself. It will be a fascinating day full of insights into both living and working with Dissociative Identity Disorder.

*Please note that some content may be triggering for survivors but attempts will be made throughout the day to give advance warning*

For further information or to book please go to [www.tasc-online.org.uk/training.html](http://www.tasc-online.org.uk/training.html).

## New PODS Forum & Members' Only Area of Website

We have now launched a forum on the PODS website. This is open to DID survivors, partners, counsellors and other relevant professionals. We have set this up in response to many people who have expressed an interest in communicating this way. It is as far as we can ensure a 'safe' environment. Only people with whom we have had personal contact are allowed to register and post on the site – so in practice this means someone we know personally; someone who has attended one of our training events (a PODS workshop or one of Carolyn's training days); someone who has spoken directly to us on the helpline; or someone with whom we have had substantial correspondence via email. Nowhere on the internet is completely 'safe' but the forum page itself is password-protected so that no-one can just 'eavesdrop'. Your identity is also protected by means of having a non-identifying username of your own choosing.

We would like it to be a positive forum, not a place just to whinge! We hope that, as with all we do in PODS, people can be encouraged by one other, and share useful and positive insights as well as the difficulties and struggles of DID. We will trial the forum for a few months and see how it goes. What we need is for people to get involved so that it can get going, gain some momentum and become a place worth visiting. We would love to see lots of new discussions started, to build up an exciting virtual community that is worth belonging to, with lots of useful information, sharing of resources and stories of hope. One of the key issues for folks with a dissociative disorder is a sense of shame and isolation, being 'cut off' from the rest of the world. Getting together on a forum and realising that you are not the only one who thinks and acts the way you do, but that there are others on the same journey as you, and other partners who are having the same joys and struggles, can be part of the recovery process. So get thinking about what issues you would like to raise ... and don't be shy about responding to others! Please remember that we are all concerned for each other's welfare and so please keep content as safe, sensitive and non-triggering as possible.

Also available to people who register with us is an additional page on the website with some extra articles that we want to make available to people but which due to their sensitive content we don't want to splash around the entire worldwide web. The same login will work for the forum as for this members' only page.

To register, please email us at [info@pods-online.org.uk](mailto:info@pods-online.org.uk) and we will get back to you. Once registered/approved, the forum can be found either via the navigation on the homepage, or at [www.pods-online.org.uk/forum.html](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/forum.html). The members' only area can also be found via the navigation on the homepage under the 'information' tab, or at [www.pods-online.org.uk/members.html](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/members.html).

## Emergency DID Info Cards

To date we have now distributed over 1200 of our 'Emergency DID Information Cards' and they are still available free of charge to anyone who wants them.

They were produced in response to a request from a therapist whose client was ill-treated by healthcare staff following an emergency admission to A&E. None of the staff had heard of DID and even the duty psychiatrist was sceptical. It was therefore felt that it would be useful to have a card which carried some information about DID and which would be presented to health staff to inform them and to help 'authenticate' the condition.

PODS consulted with a number of people on the matter including FPP (First Person Plural) and some people within TAG (Trauma and Abuse Group). The cards are double-sided business-card size so they fit easily into a purse or wallet. One side contains information on a "How to Help" basis, explaining the existence of alters and the realities of amnesia and disorientation, while the reverse side carries more technical information about DID from a medical perspective.

Go to [www.pods-online.org.uk/resources.html](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/resources.html) for more details and to order, or email [info@pods-online.org.uk](mailto:info@pods-online.org.uk) letting us know your name, address and how many you would like.

### DID Emergency Information Card — How to Help

I have a condition known as Dissociative Identity Disorder. I am not 'mad' and nor am I attention-seeking or time-wasting. I have a history of severe childhood trauma and DID is a coping mechanism for this. DID is treatable via long-term individual psychotherapy.

I have different 'parts', 'alters' or 'personalities'. These may present as being of a different gender, age and developmental stage. We may be very frightened and traumatised and have difficulty distinguishing between the past and the present, so we may find it really hard to calm down. Please be careful about touching us and be gentle and patient. 'Alter personalities' may not be aware of what we have done (eg self-harm or attempted suicide) or where we are. We may be very disorientated and amnesic for what has just happened. Please try to understand our behaviours in the light of our past experiences.

This card is produced by PODS. For more information about DID and organisations that can help please go to our website at:

[www.pods-online.org.uk](http://www.pods-online.org.uk).



### Information on DID — For Health Professionals

DID (formerly MPD): see DSM-IV TR section 300.14 and ICD10 section F44.

- complex form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder caused by severe childhood trauma and abuse
- as in PTSD, may be severe dysregulation with intrusions such as flashbacks and avoidances eg phobia of touch; also episodes of overwhelming psychological distress, with amnesia, disorientation, marked somatisation
- patient/client may benefit from contacting therapist or supporter to stabilise
- "characterised by the presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states that recurrently take control of the individual's behaviour, accompanied by an inability to recall important personal information that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness" (DSM-IV TR)
- for further information go to <http://tinyurl.com/DIDinfo>

## Useful Resources

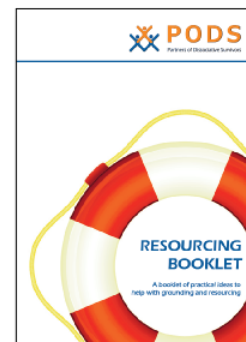
We now have a number of resources available on the PODS website at [www.pods-online.org.uk/resources.html](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/resources.html). These include:

### PODS Resourcing Booklet

A booklet of practical ideas to help with grounding and resourcing.

*"This booklet contains some ideas of things that will help you to turn down your triggered, panicking 'back brain' and get your sensible, thinking, problem-solving 'front brain' back online."*

This booklet is available for free if you attend one of our workshop days. Alternatively you may purchase it for £2.50 inc P&P by Paypal or debit/credit card via the PODS website.

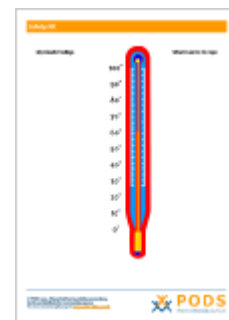


### Grounding and Coping Resources — FREE downloads

PODS is currently putting together a series of resources to help dissociative survivors cope with triggers and everyday life.

At the moment we have two free resources available as downloadable PDFs:

**'Emotional Thermometer'** — this is a sheet to fill out either on your own, with a partner, or with a therapist, to identify what kinds of emotions you have on a 0-100 degrees scale. You list this sliding scale of emotions on one side of the thermometer, and on the other side, you identify what kinds of things you can do to cope when you're feeling that way.



**'Alphabet of Emotions'** — it's very common for survivors of abuse, including dissociative survivors, to struggle to put words to their feelings. This is a common symptom called 'alexithymia'. This 'Alphabet of Emotions' can help you to start identifying your feelings and increasing your emotional vocabulary. There is a sheet of possible emotions on one page with some fun cartoon characters, and on the next is a grid where you can start to build up your vocabulary of feelings. This can be very helpful when you get into a crisis so that even in your worst moments you can point at the sheet to communicate!



Go to [www.pods-online.org.uk/resources.html](http://www.pods-online.org.uk/resources.html) to download them.

## TAG (Trauma and Abuse Group)



TAG is the Trauma and Abuse Group and is a charity with a membership open to survivors, counsellors, partners, healthcare professionals—just about anyone!

Membership is only £15.00 per year and the benefits include at least two copies per year of their journal/magazine *Interact* (edited by Carolyn Spring). This contains many articles of interest to both therapists and survivors/partners — each edition contains a range of contributions aimed at a wide readership. TAG members also receive quarterly members' e-newsletters which contains up-to-date details of training events, as well as further articles, book notices and reviews, and regular news items.

Membership also provides several other benefits including discounts at both TAG events (eg the TAG conference) and other organisation's training days/conferences and more recently Janina Fisher's 'webinar' series—TAG members were entitled to a 75% discount.

For further information, check out the TAG website, which also contains a wealth of information including articles and links to other organisations: [www.tag-uk.net](http://www.tag-uk.net)