



Essential Information

What is Schizotypal Personality Disorder?

Schizotypal Personality Disorder (SPD) is a term used to describe a pattern of personality traits that may include difficulties forming close relationships and unusual experiences (e.g. strange thoughts and seeing the world differently to others). People with SPD are also likely to experience depression and anxiety. These traits usually emerge in adolescence or early adulthood and affect most areas of life, including relationships, work, and study.

Problems with emotions and expressing feelings

People with SPD may find emotions intense and overwhelming. Sometimes people with SPD get worried about being around people because they can be very sensitive and ‘feel’ the emotions of other people. For this reason, they may try to avoid feeling emotions by isolating themselves from other people and situations – preferring to “live in their own world” as it can be much more comfortable and predictable. They may also feel suspicious of others, such as believing that most people have negative feelings about them.

Relationship difficulties

While some people with SPD may express a desire to have close relationships, they could still feel uncomfortable around others. Other people with SPD might not have much interest in forming close relationships. For these reasons, it may be common for a person with SPD to have none or very few close friends. People with SPD might also feel anxious in social situations. This anxiety doesn’t usually go away, even if they’re familiar with the other person or people. Instead, they may find it very hard to trust others and can feel that they just don’t “fit in”.

Unusual experiences and ways of seeing the world

People with SPD may have thoughts that other people consider to be strange. For example, they might believe that they have special powers or can read other people’s thoughts. Sometimes,

they might feel like things they see or hear have a special meaning for them that other people can’t understand. For these reasons, they might find other people judge them as being ‘different’.

How common are these problems and why do they develop?

It is estimated that around 6.5% of the population experiences personality disorder problems, with a smaller number experiencing SPD. The exact causes of SPD are unknown but they are thought to involve several contributing factors:

- Biological or genetic factors (inherited from family)
- Relationship with caregivers in early childhood
- Traumatic early life experiences (e.g., abuse, neglect, death of parents, peer-victimisation)
- Ways of thinking and coping with feelings – often learnt during childhood and through experiences with other people
- Stressful social circumstances – financial, work, relationship, or family

Can it be treated?

Yes, specialist psychological treatments provided by mental health professionals have been shown to be effective in reducing symptoms and improving life quality. One of the hardest things might be to take the first step and seek help. Support for family and partners may also be important. For treatment and support contact your local health services.

