When rejection *hits hard.*

Many neurodivergent people — especially people with ADHD — describe a sudden, intense emotional pain when they sense rejection or criticism. It can arrive in seconds and feel much bigger than the moment that set it off.

Sometimes the rejection is real. Sometimes it's a guess — a short text, a neutral face, a delayed reply. Either way, the hurt is real, and it isn't a sign that you're "too sensitive."

ABOUT THE NAME

You may hear "rejection sensitivity" or "RSD" (rejection sensitive dysphoria). It's a **commonly used term, not a formal diagnosis** — a helpful way to name an experience many people share.

TWO WAYS IT CAN GO

The spiral, and the pause

THE SPIRAL

1 · TRIGGER
A friend replies "ok." with a period.

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2 · STORY MY BRAIN TELLS
"They're annoyed. I did something wrong."

↓

3 · BIG FEELING
Hot face, tight chest, shame that fills the room.

↓

4 · REACTION I REGRET
Snapping back, over-apologizing, or going silent for days.

THE PAUSE

1 · TRIGGER
Same text. Same "ok."

↓ THE FORK — CATCH THE STORY

2 · PAUSE & NAME IT
"This is rejection sensitivity. It feels huge right now."

↓

3 · CHECK THE FACTS
What do I actually know? They might just be busy.

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4 · CHOOSE MY RESPONSE
Wait an hour, or ask kindly: "All good with us?"

The pause doesn't mean you stop feeling it. The feeling is real — the pause just gives you a choice about what happens next.

Continued on back →

STEP 3, UP CLOSE

Reality-check questions

Ask these once the first wave settles. You don't need all six — one good one can be enough.

1. What actually happened — just the facts, no story?
2. What are three other reasons this could have happened?
3. Would I read it this way if I were rested and fed?
4. What has this person shown me about how they feel before?
5. What would I tell a friend who told me this story?
6. Will this matter as much tomorrow, or next week?

BEFORE YOU THINK IT THROUGH

Soothe the body first

A calmer body makes the questions above much easier to answer.



Slow your breath

Breathe out longer than you breathe in, a few times.



Move it through

Pace, shake out your hands, dance to one song.



Add gentle pressure

A weighted blanket, a tight hoodie, a firm self-hug.



Step outside

Fresh air, sky, a change of room — anything new to notice.

SAY IT OUT LOUD

Words for the moment

TO YOURSELF

"My brain is sounding an alarm. That doesn't mean there's a fire. I can wait before I decide what this means."

TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST

"I might be reading too much into this, but I'm feeling a little worried. Are we okay?"

YOUR TURN

My common triggers

_____

_____

_____

What helps me come back down

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For education and community support, not diagnosis. For personal guidance, reach out to a neurodivergent-affirming professional. In crisis in the US? Call or text 988.