

NAVIGATING REJECTION SENSITIVE DYSPHORIA

A quick reference guide for educators

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) is a hard-wired, neurological response where the *perception* of criticism triggers an instantaneous physical wave of pain. It can disguise itself as perfectionism, class-clowning, or explosive anger in children and adults with ADHD. Understanding RSD can significantly improve your interactions with students who experience it.

Providing Feedback to a Student with RSD

Best Practices

- **Private Correction:** Use sticky notes, a quiet sidebar, or silent visual signals.
- **Neutral Tone:** Keep your face relaxed ("Warm Neutrality") and voice flat/calm.
- **Focus on Growth:** "You are not there YET."
- **Level Physicality:** Crouch or pull up a chair.

Practices to Avoid

- **Public Shaming:** Writing names on the board or calling out behaviors publicly.
- **Stern/Disappointed Tone:** Saying, "I expected better," or using a heavy sigh.
- **Focus on Finality:** "This project does not meet standards."
- **Dominance Posture:** Standing over a seated student.

By implementing these strategies, educators can create a more supportive and understanding learning environment for students with RSD, fostering their growth and well-being. Remember that consistency and empathy are key to building trust and helping students navigate their challenges.

