

Scoring the Dissociative Experiences Scale – DES (and DES-II)

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Q: “In my EMDR Basic Training I was taught to use the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) in Phase One – History/Treatment Planning with all clients. How do I score the DES?”

A: Here are some easily accessible resources for understanding and scoring the DES and DES-II that I have found:

1. DES scoring manual:

- You can find the original article: Carlson, Eve B. & Putnam, Frank W. (1992). Manual for the Dissociative Experiences Scale. Beloit, WI: Available (for purchase) through the Sidran Foundation at <http://www.sidran.org/>
- The total score for the entire DES is the average score for all items. Once the clinician has verified that all items have been answered, simply add all of the item scores and divide by 28 to determine the total DES score. This yields a score in a range from 0 to 100.
- Caution: Unfortunately, there are documents in circulation that make reference to achieving the total DES score by dropping the 0 from each item and then adding up the item score. This is not correct.
- For those trained by the EMDR Institute or Trauma Recovery/EMDR HAP, in the appendix of your Weekend One Manual you will find the “*Manual for the Dissociative Experiences Scale*” (Carlson & Putnam, 1993.) Excerpts from the manual, including information on scoring are provided, as well as the DES test itself. In the most current (2013) Weekend One Manual, see pages 144-151. Carlson and Putnam suggest that any individual item scored a 20 or more be investigated further by the clinician.

2. Clinical Signs of Dissociative Disorders:

Also in the EMDR Institute’s Weekend One Manual appendix is a section “*Clinical Signs of Dissociative Disorders*” by Gerald Puk, Ph.D. Of particular interest is a section entitled ‘Screening for Dissociative Disorders’ that references the DES, and the DES-T (DES Taxon Calculator, referenced below.) In the current W1 manual, this is on pages 140-143. In the current Weekend 2 manual, this article is on pages 100-103.

3. Introduction to the DES by Colin Ross:

http://www.rossinst.com/dissociative_experiences_scale.html has a great introduction to the DES.

4. Clearest introduction to dissociation screening tools and specific suggestions for asking your client about dissociative experiences:

My favorite “beginners guide” to recognizing and assessing dissociation is in Ross and Halpern’s 2009 book Trauma Model Therapy: A Treatment Approach for Trauma, Dissociation, and Complex Comorbidity. Manitou Communications. In the book they provide numerous tests for screening for and diagnosing dissociation/dissociative disorders AND include guidance in how to actually ASK about dissociation. They even include transcripts of sessions to provide an example of the kind of language you might use to ask clients about their experiences. On pp 19-21 they suggest:

- An average score of 20-30 indicates possible PTSD or DDNOS
- An average score of 30 or more indicates possible DID

5. Caution with extremely low scores:

A client that scores ALL 0’s is someone I will screen VERY carefully for dissociation and dissociative disorders and be watchful of signs of dissociation and dissociative processes throughout treatment The DES is full of questions asking about NORMAL dissociation – so if a client scores all zero’s, they are denying normal human experiences.

6. How long to screen for dissociation and dissociative disorders:

When are you “done” screening for dissociation? *Never*. Because the BLS in EMDR seems to dissolve dissociative barriers, I have found that quite frequently it isn’t until I begin the reprocessing phases of EMDR that I recognize the degree to which someone dissociates. So, even if you have “ruled out” dissociation in the past, keep watching for dissociation.

7. DES subscales:

Carlson, Putnam, et al (1991) identified three subscales of the DES that may be useful to the EMDR clinician in planning for EMDR processing: Absorption and Imaginative Involvement (questions 2,14-18,20,22,23); Amnesia (questions 3-6, 8,10,25,26); and Depersonalization and Derealization (questions 7,11-13,27,28). The following DES Factor Analysis document includes the DES Average, the DES_T items, and the DES subscales: <http://www.pratherapists.com/DES%20Scoring.doc>

8. DES-Taxon:

The DES-Taxon (DES-T) is an eight item measure drawn from the DES-II that determines whether the individual score is related to pathological dissociation (Taxon), or to more normal dissociation that likely does not indicate a dissociative disorder. The taxon is based in Items 3, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 22, and 27. The probability of the individual belonging to the pathological taxon will automatically be calculated by the program. The DES Taxon Excel program is available for free in the public domain, thanks to Daryl Perry, and can be downloaded at http://www.isst-d.org/downloads/DES_Taxon.xls with more information available at <http://www.isst-d.org/default.asp?contentID=66>.

- To score the DES Taxon Calculator on the excel spreadsheet:
 - At bottom of the form you will see the tabs “Scores” “Calc.”
 - On the SCORES tab: After you enter all your client’s responses in column E, field E30 calculates the average DES score (as Roxanne mentioned).
 - On the CALC tab: Field G32 provides the calculated probability (likelihood) of the individual having a dissociative disorder: from 0 to 1.0. People tend to score very close to 0 or very close to 1.00.
- As EMDR Institute Trainer, Gerald Puk, Ph.D. clearly states in his article “Clinical Signs of Dissociative Disorders” (in your W1 and W2 manuals), “While the DES-T can indicate the probability that a particular individual exhibits pathological dissociative symptoms, it provides neither a thorough assessment nor a conclusive diagnosis of the client’s dissociative disorder. It will be necessary to evaluate the client for thoroughly to obtain a definitive diagnosis.” (p 141) He goes on to describe other screening and diagnostic tests you can use for more comprehensive diagnosis.

9. Learning more about dissociation:

I encourage ALL EMDR therapists to learn more about dissociation. Go to <http://www.isst-d.org> to learn more about the prevalence, diagnosis, and treatment of clients with dissociation and dissociative disorders. An article written for EMDR therapists early in our history (1995) that is still relevant today is by EMDR Institute facilitator and EMDRIA Approved Consultant, Sandra Paulsen, Ph.D: “Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing: Its Cautious Use in the Dissociative Disorders”, available free/full-text at https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/1592/Diss_8_1_6_OC_R_rev.pdf.

10. A great article by Colin Ross on EMDR and dissociation:

Colin Ross, M.D., wrote the article, “EMDR IS BASED ON A TRAUMA-DISSOCIATION MODEL OF MENTAL DISORDERS” – soon after he was trained in EMDR. It available for

free, full-text download:

<http://www.advancededucationalproductions.com/publications-articles/COLINROSS.pdf>

11. "Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing: It's cautious Use in Dissociative Disorders (1995):

An early article cautioning therapists about the use of EMDR with those that may have a dissociative disorder was written by Sandra Paulsen, PhD and can be found online as a free, full-text pdf:

https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/1592/Diss_8_1_6_OCR_rev.pdf

OTHER RESOURCES

Dissociation and Dissociative Disorders:

The **International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD)** is a great resource. www.isstd.org. The ISSTD Guidelines for Treating Dissociative Identity Disorder in Adults (2011) can be downloaded at http://www.isstd.org/itd/GUIDELINES_REVISED2011.pdf.

Sidran Institute provides publications on dissociation. www.sidran.org

The **EMDRIA Annual Conference** offers numerous workshops each year on managing dissociative processes during EMDR and the use of EMDR with dissociative disorders. Audio recordings of the 90 minute to 6 hour workshops can be accessed through www.emdria.org.

Beere, D. B. (2003, September). The dissociative disorders: Update, current research, and applications of EMDR. Pre-conference workshop at the annual meeting of the EMDR International Association, Denver, CO.

Boone, Steele, van der Hart (2011). *Coping with Trauma-Related Dissociation: Skills Training for Patients and Therapists*. W.W. Norton.

Fine, C. G. (1996, June). EMDR-facilitated trauma work in patients with dissociative identity disorders. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the EMDR International Association, Denver, CO.

Paulsen, S. L. (2003, September). EMDR and ego state therapy: Energizing disowned aspects of self with dissociative table technique interwoven with EMDR. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the EMDR International Association, Denver, CO.

Lanius, U., & Paulsen, S. (2010, September/October). Part I - Towards an embodied self: The neurobiology of traumatic dissociation. Paper presented at the annual meeting of EMDR International Association, Minneapolis, MN.

Lanius, U., & Paulsen, S. (2010, September/October). Part II - Towards an embodied self: The treatment of traumatic dissociation. Paper presented at the annual meeting of EMDR International Association, Minneapolis, MN.

Napier, N. (1993) *Getting Through the Day: Strategies for Adults Hurt as Children*. W.W. Norton.

Rouanzoin, Curt. The Utilization of EMDR with Dissociative Symptoms Distance: The Use of EMDR with Complex Trauma & Dissociative Symptoms. Distance Learning DVD Course available through the EMDR Institute at www.emdr.com

Vermillyea, E. (2000). *Growing Beyond Survival: A Self-Help Toolkit for Managing Traumatic Stress*. Sidran Press.

Books, chapters and journal articles that address use of EMDR with dissociative disorders include:

Don Beere. (2009). [An EMDR protocol for dissociative identity disorder](#). In M. Luber (Ed.), Eye movement desensitization (EMDR) scripted protocols: Special populations (pp. 387-425). New York: Springer Publishing.

Don Beere. (2009). [Modified resource development and installation \(RDI\) procedures with dissociative clients](#). In M. Luber (Ed.), Eye movement desensitization (EMDR) scripted protocols: Special populations (pp. 281-290). New York: Springer Publishing.

Gomez, A. (2012, May). [EMDR therapy and adjunct approaches with children: Complex trauma, attachment, and dissociation](#). New York, NY: Springer Publishing

Gonzalez, A., & Mosquera, D. (2012, June). [EMDR and dissociation: The progressive approach](#). A. I.

- Fine, C., Paulsen, S., Rouanzoin, C., Lubert, M., Puk, G., & Young, W. (2001). *A general guide to the use of EMDR in the dissociative disorders: A task force report*. In F. Shapiro, *EMDR: Basic principles, practices and procedures, 2nd Ed.* (pp. 365-369) New York: Guilford Press.
- Fine, C. & Berkowitz, A. (2008, April). The joint use of EMDR and hypnosis in the treatment of DID, DDNOS and complex PTSD. Workshop presented at the 1st bi-annual European Society for Trauma and Dissociation Conference, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- Fine, C. (2009). [The wreathing protocol: The imbrication of hypnosis and EMDR in the treatment of dissociative identity disorder, dissociative disorder not otherwise specified, and post-traumatic stress disorder](#). In M. Lubert (Ed.), *Eye movement desensitization (EMDR) scripted protocols: Special populations* (pp. 329-347). NY: Springer Publishing.
- Forgash, C. A., & Copeley, M. (2008). [Healing the heart of trauma and dissociation with EMDR and ego state therapy](#). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.
- Knipe, J. (2014). [EMDR Toolbox: Theory and Treatment of Complex PTSD and Dissociation](#). New York: Springer Publishing.
- Knipe, J. (2008). “Loving eyes: Procedures to therapeutically reverse dissociative processes while preserving emotional safety.” In C. Forgash and M. Copeley, (Eds.) [Healing the heart of trauma and dissociation with EMDR and ego state therapy](#) (pp. 181-225). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.
- Knipe, J. (2009). “[The method of constant installation of present orientation and safety \(CIPOS\)](#).” In M. Lubert (Ed.), [Eye movement desensitization \(EMDR\) scripted protocols: Special populations](#) (pp. 235-241). New York: Springer Publishing .
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- Lanius, U. F. (2005). [EMDR processing with dissociative clients: Adjunctive use of opioid antagonists](#). In R. Shapiro (Ed.), *EMDR solutions: Pathways to healing* (pp. 121-146). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Paulsen, S. L., & Lanius, U. (2009). [Toward an embodied self: Integrating EMDR with somatic and ego state interventions](#). In R. Shapiro (Ed.), *EMDR Solutions II: For depression, eating disorders, performance and more* (pp. 335-388). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Paulsen, S. (2009). [Looking through the eyes of trauma and dissociation: An illustrated guide for EMDR therapists and clients \(269 pp.\)](#). Bainbridge Island, WA: Sandra Paulsen, Ph.D..
- Paulsen, S. (2009). ACT-AS-IF and ARCHITECTS approaches to EMDR: Treatment of dissociative identity disorder (DID). In M. Lubert (Ed.), *Eye movement desensitization (EMDR) scripted protocols: Special populations*(pp. 357-386). New York: Springer Publishing.
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- Paulsen, S. (2008). [Treating dissociative identity disorder with EMDR, ego state therapy, and adjunct approaches](#) in Forgash, C.A., & Copeley, M. (2008). [Healing the heart of trauma and dissociation with EMDR and ego state therapy](#). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.
- Twombly, J. H. (2005). [EMDR for clients with dissociative identity disorder, DDNOS, and ego states](#). In R. Shapiro (Ed.), *EMDR solutions: Pathways to healing* (pp. 88-120). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.
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- van der Hart, O., Groenendijk, M., Gonzalez, A., Mosquera, D., & Solomon, R. (2013). [Dissociation of the personality and EMDR therapy in complex trauma-related disorders: Applications in the stabilization phase](#). *Journal of EMDR Practice and Research*, 7(2), 81-94. doi:10.1891/1933-3196.7.2.81.

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I hope this provides some helpful information as you use and interpret the DES with *all your clients* prior to the active trauma processing phases of EMDR.

Warmly,

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