



Alexithymia

Emotional Blindness

Reviewed by Psychology Today Staff

Alexithymia, also known as emotional blindness, is a personality feature in which a person has difficulty experiencing, identifying, understanding, and expressing their emotions. This can be influenced by several factors including genetics, past experiences, and certain medical conditions. About **10 to 13 percent** of the population has this trait, with more men than women experiencing it.

The late psychiatrist Peter Sifneos, a professor at Harvard, introduced this term in 1972, which means *no words for emotions*. A person with alexithymia has a hard time processing their own emotions, which affects the way they respond to other people's emotions, with relationships suffering as a result. Alexithymia is not a mental health disorder, and there is no clinical diagnosis. However, it does appear in conjunction with conditions including autism spectrum disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress, as well as neurologic problems such as brain injury.

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The Trait of Alexithymia

chest when angry. They may appear humorless, distant, empathetic, and rigid. Their limited emotional vocabulary stifles their ability to communicate their feelings with others.

Do genetics play a role in alexithymia?

There is some evidence suggesting that alexithymia can run in families. A study on identical and fraternal twins showed that there may be a **genetic predisposition** for this trait. One study found a higher prevalence in first-degree relatives of those with alexithymia.

Can a person's environment influence alexithymia?

Research on twins also shows that a person's environment can affect the development of alexithymia. People who have suffered **childhood trauma** or abuse may have difficulty processing their emotions. In addition, people with brain injury also show higher rates of alexithymia as well as overall mental distress and lower levels of coping.

How does alexithymia affect a person's relationships?



Is alexithymia associated with mental health disorders?



disorder?



Can alexithymia show up in people with brain injury?



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How to Address Alexithymia

Self-care can help a person cope with alexithymia. **Mindfulness**, for one, has a positive influence on this trait; to be mindful, one must be aware and observe how they feel, this in turn can help a person learn to describe how they feel. Also, creative practices like journaling, reading fiction, and drawing can help a person get in touch with their emotions.

Is there a way to measure this trait?

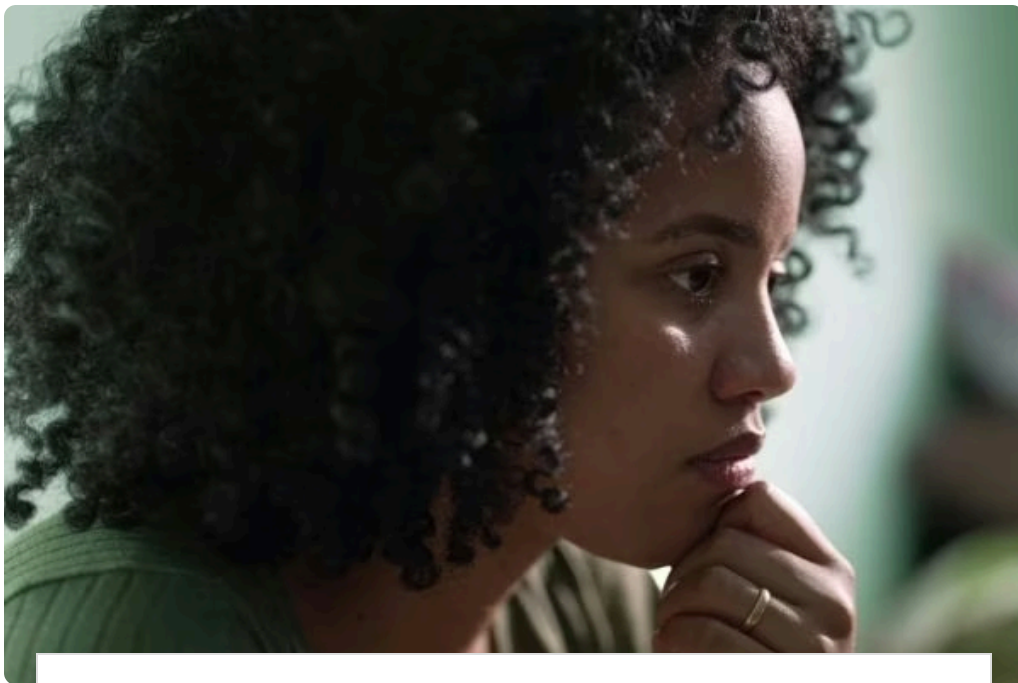
There are a few **assessment tools** including the Toronto Alexithymia Scale and the Bermond-Vorst Alexithymia

observations.

Can therapy help a person with alexithymia?

Therapies that help a person become more aware of their emotions can be useful. Cognitive behavioral therapy and psychodynamic therapy have been studied and are shown to be effective for alexithymia.

Essential Reads



What's Happening When We Can't Tell How We Feel

Interoception, abnormal processing, and depression.



Alexithymia and Medically Unexplained Symptoms

Alexithymia makes it challenging to understand that physical symptoms can sometimes be the somatic equivalent of underlying emotional distress and not an indication of illness.



How Parental Alexithymia Impacts Families

Alexithymia can burden interpersonal relationships owing to emotional difficulties. However, research shows that emotional