

Supporting Someone with DID

By Jane H

On a daily basis, most individuals have feelings of being separate from others, being disconnected, feelings of having lost yourself and not knowing how to get back that stability that you need, not having a clear picture of how we fit in, and how and where we belong.

Before my involvement with dissociation, I had no idea, no concept that survivors experiencing dissociative states have to live with these normally transitory feelings, permanently.

My passion and training is in Mental Health, I also volunteer as a Samaritan listener.

My journey with DID has been exasperating, rewarding, an emotional roller coaster in many ways. I'm Kathryn's personal support worker and for the last five years. I've witnessed her journey, her coping with First Person Plurals growth and evolving, her fighting for improved services and personally to secure therapy and day to day support services.

I see my role, as a quiet, unassuming presence for Kathryn. Encouraging, grounding, advocating, the usual tools needed to encourage growth within a recovery orientated model. This role constantly evolves and fluctuates, no two days are the same. Boundaries and expectations are forever changing. This can be confusing, distressing and at times infuriating but it's all about what the person with DID is experiencing in that moment, what that person needs from you, so it is always changing, it's all part of the 'package', it's all valid and important, and never dull!

Ironically, Kathryn intermittently asks 'aren't you bored?', I now, just give her a small smile and a look, I don't have to answer! She usually asks this after I've supported her through another successfully completed day of training for FPP.

The dynamics that Kathryn and Melanie impart during training constantly change, each day is different, because they share so much of themselves in their personal journeys. I feel I learn something new each time or see something from a new perspective.

I can see tiny fluctuations in Kathryn's demeanour, facial expressions, mannerisms, throughout the day, so I'm aware that she's switched and try to help ground her if need be.

It can appear, to those without sufficient knowledge or understanding of dissociation, that at times that I'm doing 'very little', but observing. As one 'professional' once pointed out to me, whilst attending a training day. This concerned me and others, as she was already in a team supporting DID clients. No, I'm not a therapist, I'm not making huge life changes in Kathryn's quality of life, but I hope, by noticing her distress or switching (which in itself is a learnt tool), she may need my emotional or practical support, when a certain part of the day is problematic for her. This could be, whilst she is feeling depersonalised and experiencing a switch, she may walk into an argument in the street, inadvertently knock into a youth, and I would manoeuvre her away from harm and try to diffuse the situation, especially if they had heard the voice of an inner-child. It may be something minute, like a question asked by a course participant which triggers or panics her, I hope I'm able to ground and bring some stability back and ultimately safety.

Another important aspect of a supporters role is understanding the reality of living with dissociation, this is paramount. To accept, understand and not judge. To value the work needed 'behind the scenes', the façade created, to present a seamless, efficient individual. For example, with Kathryn, this would be an important meeting, a training day, a health appointment, the internal negotiations needed between 'little ones', teenagers, other parts, the compromises in order for the adult wanting to do the task to be in control, so time is built in for play etc, all has to be considered. This can seem bizarre and surreal at times, but its important to stay focused, open minded, and open to continual learning.

Most importantly for me, is the development and nurturing of empathy as a skill. Dissociation in the media is sensationalised, that's how it grabs the headlines, but an everyday continuum, it is not the big switch, the bizarre behaviours, distorted voices, its tiny often insignificant things which may trigger, upset or panic Kathryn. That is they may seem insignificant and negligible, on a day to day scale of events, but it matters to her and is therefore very important to me, I hope I can make a difference.