



## **RSD (Rejection Sensitivity) Guide**

*Why feedback or tone can feel catastrophic... and what helps soothe the drop.*

**By Neal Glendenning**

**Contact: [info@theneuroinclusionproject.co.uk](mailto:info@theneuroinclusionproject.co.uk)**

© 2025 Neal Glendenning / The Neuro Inclusion Project / NdCare Group.  
All rights reserved.

This material may not be reproduced, distributed, adapted, or used for training, commercial, or educational purposes without prior written permission.

### **Important note**

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

## A steady orientation

This guide is not here to toughen you up.  
It's not here to teach you how to take criticism better.  
It's not here to help you "stop caring."

It's here to explain **why certain moments hit so hard**, so fast... and how to support your nervous system **after the drop**, without shame or self-erasure.

You don't need to read this all at once.  
You don't need to fix anything while reading.  
Understanding alone can be regulating.

---

## 1. RSD is not fragility... it's a nervous system response

Rejection Sensitivity (often called RSD) is commonly misunderstood as:

- being thin-skinned
- overreacting
- taking things personally

What's actually happening is usually this:

**Your nervous system reads relational threat faster and more intensely than average.**

That threat might come from:

- feedback
- a shift in tone
- delayed replies
- ambiguity
- perceived disappointment
- social comparison

The reaction is not a choice.  
It's **state-based**... and often immediate.

---

## 2. Why it feels so sudden and total

Many ND nervous systems are:

- highly attuned to relational cues

- sensitive to power dynamics
- dependent on predictability for safety

So when something lands as “rejection,” the body may respond with:

- a sharp emotional drop
- shame flooding
- panic or collapse
- urge to withdraw or disappear
- spiralling self-criticism

This is not emotional excess.

It’s the nervous system saying:

*“Connection might be at risk. Mobilise or protect.”*

---

### 3. RSD is about safety, not self-esteem

RSD is often framed as a confidence issue.

In reality, it’s usually about:

- **belonging**
- **attachment**
- **predictability**
- **relational safety**

The pain isn’t just:

*“They don’t like me.”*

It’s often:

*“I might not be safe here anymore.”*

That’s why reassurance helps sometimes...  
and why logic often doesn’t.

---

### 4. The “drop” is a state shift, not a truth

After a triggering moment, many people experience a **rapid internal collapse**.

You might notice:

- everything feels heavy or pointless
- your self-image suddenly worsens
- you want to quit, disappear, or undo everything
- your body feels drained or numb

This doesn't mean the feedback was accurate.  
It means your system **lost regulation**.

Important reframe:

**The story you tell yourself during the drop is state-dependent.**

It will not sound the same once regulation returns.

---

## 5. What *doesn't* help in the moment

*(even if it's well-intended)*

When RSD is active, these often make things worse:

- "Don't take it personally"
- "They didn't mean it like that"
- "You're overthinking"
- forcing perspective-taking
- self-criticism for reacting

These approaches assume cognitive access that isn't available **yet**.

---

## 6. What helps soothe the drop

*(gentle, body-first supports)*

When the reaction hits, the goal is not insight.  
The goal is **stabilisation**.

You might experiment with:

- reducing social input temporarily
- grounding through pressure, warmth, or stillness
- naming the state ("This is an RSD drop")
- postponing responses or decisions
- being near someone safe without explaining
- allowing emotion without solving it

You are not avoiding the issue.  
You are **buying regulation time**.

---

## 7. After regulation returns (later, not now)

Only once the nervous system settles might it be helpful to:

- revisit what was actually said
- separate tone from meaning
- check assumptions gently
- decide if repair or clarification is needed

This is not about dismissing your reaction.

It's about **not letting a dysregulated state run the narrative**.

---

## 8. Long-term supports that reduce intensity

*(not quick fixes)*

RSD often softens over time when:

- feedback becomes more predictable
- expectations are made explicit
- relational repair is normalised
- environments reduce ambiguity
- you are believed about your experience

This is not about becoming less sensitive.

It's about **needing fewer emergency responses**.

---

## 9. If RSD has shaped your choices

Many people quietly change their lives around RSD:

- avoiding feedback-heavy roles
- over-preparing
- people-pleasing
- staying silent
- burning out trying to be “unreproachable”

These are not flaws.

They are **adaptations**.

You're allowed to honour them *and* outgrow them... at your pace.

---

## **A closing permission**

Feeling rejection deeply does not mean you are weak.  
It means connection matters to your nervous system.

You don't need to desensitise yourself to be worthy.  
You don't need to stop caring to be safe.

You are allowed to:

- take time before responding
- ask for clarity instead of guessing
- need warmth after feedback
- protect yourself while you regulate

This guide isn't here to make feedback painless.

It's here to remind you that when the drop happens...  
**nothing has gone wrong.**

