

## ADJUSTMENT DISORDERS

---

**SAMPLE ©2009 LEAP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.**

### **Core Concepts**

An Adjustment Disorder develops emotional or behavioral symptoms in response to an identifiable stressor(s).

The reaction to the stressor(s) impairs the person's ability to function at work, school, and/or socially. The symptoms may also seem excessive for the degree of stress the person is experiencing.

The nature of the stressor(s) overwhelms the person's ability to cope with his/her environment. The stressor may occur once, often, or chronically.

Generally the more severe the stressor(s), the more likely the person is to develop an Adjustment Disorder.

Individuals with personality disorders or cognitive disorders may increase the individual's ability to cope with stress.

Symptoms begin within a short period of time of the onset of the stressor but must occur within three months. The symptoms cannot persist past six months of the termination of the stressor(s). If the stressor is chronic (e.g., a serious illness) the Adjustment Disorder may persist for a long time.

These disorders are coded based upon the following subtypes with the specific stressor indicated on Axis IV:

- Anxiety
- Depressed mood
- Disturbance of conduct
- Mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct
- Mixed anxiety & depressed mood or
- Unspecified.

Specify:

- If the symptoms have persisted for less than six months = Acute
- If the symptoms have persisted for more than six months = Chronic

## CASE SCENARIO

**SAMPLE ©2009 LEAP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.**

### ELAINE

Elaine is a 43-year-old married female who moved out of state with her husband and three children, due to a transfer by his employer. Elaine made an appointment with the local family counseling center three months after the transfer because she found herself having crying episodes and feeling “a bit depressed.”

During her intake evaluation, Elaine reports being embarrassed about wasting the social worker’s time. “After all,” she said, “I’m really not that bad. I’m not sure why I even came.” The social worker assured her that she was not wasting her time and wanted to know what was bothering her. Elaine complained that she “wasn’t fitting in.” Since the move, her children have adjusted to their new school and have been developing friendships. Her husband has also adjusted to his new position, which was a promotion. Elaine however isn’t adjusting as well as she hoped.

Prior to the move, Elaine worked for the U.S. Department of Treasury as an auditor. When her husband was offered the promotion, they agreed that Elaine didn’t need to work and could stay home with the children. She had always wanted to do that, or only work part time. Since arriving in the new city, she has been trying to get to know the neighbors and get involved in the children’s school. She feels she has been “rebuffed” by their immediate neighbors. She attributes this to religious differences between her family and the neighbors. Elaine thinks she is open-minded and has been in communities of religious diversity. She complains her neighbors are “closed minded” and not willing to get past their family’s religion.

Elaine describes having difficulty concentrating, crying without reason, and irritability. She has no prior history of depressive symptoms. She describes herself as “generally happy and content.” Elaine thinks if she could make friends, she would no longer feel this way. She is optimistic this will happen eventually but can’t stop feeling the way she feels now.

Elaine is most likely experiencing:

- a. Depressive Disorder NOS**
- b. Dysthmic Disorder**
- c. Situational Stress**
- d. Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood**

The correct answer is “D” – Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood. Elaine’s symptoms are the result of a stressor (moving out of state). “A” – Depressive Disorder NOS is not correct – Elaine doesn’t meet the criteria for Depressive Disorder NOS. “B” – Dysthmic Disorder is also not correct because this requires that the individual experiences symptoms for a period of two years. This is clearly not the case with Elaine. “C”- Situational Stress is also incorrect. There is no DSM-IV diagnosis of Situational Stress.