



## The Adolescent Dissociative Experiences Scale (A-DES)

Discussion by Ann Aukamp, MSW, BCD

The A-DES is a public domain 30-item self-report instrument appropriate for those aged ten to twenty-one. It is a screening tool that fits an adolescent's phase appropriate development. Modeled after the adult Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES), the A-DES was developed by a group organized by Judith Armstrong, PhD, Frank Putnam, MD and Eve Bernstein Carlson, PhD. Preliminary studies suggest that the A-DES is a reliable and valid measure of pathological dissociation in adolescents. Dissociative adolescents (diagnosed independently of the A-DES) scored significantly higher than other adolescent inpatients (Putnam 1997). However, older adolescents with psychotic disorders scored almost as high as dissociative adolescents.

The A-DES is not a diagnostic tool. Its items survey dissociative amnesia, absorption and imaginative involvement (including confusion between reality and fantasy), depersonalization, passive influence/interference experiences, and identity alteration. The A-DES is scored by summing items scores and dividing by 30 (the number of items). Overall scores can range from 0-10. Armstrong et. Al. gave both the A-DES and DES to a sample of college subjects and found their scores on each well correlated (Putnam 1997). The A-DES score approximates the DES score divided by 10. Adolescents with Dissociative Identity Disorder typically score between 4-7.

As you consider using the A-DES, please consult the current literature and/or your more experienced colleagues to update yourself about any changes or evolving areas of knowledge. While the A-DES might be used to screen for dissociative experience in large populations in a short period of time or as the basis for differential diagnosis by a clinician learning about dissociation, its primary use is in the evaluation of dissociative symptoms for individual patients. Clinicians may learn nearly as much from exploring the reasons patients chose to endorse certain items as they would from looking at test scores.

### References

Putnam, F.W. (1997). Dissociation in children and adolescents: A developmental perspective. New York, NY, Guildford Press