

The Detached Protector

When the Detached Protector mode is activated within our personality system, we're basically cut off from our emotional needs and feelings. Even though when parts behave in this mode it appears to remove our painful emotional experiences, in actuality this is only a short-term solution. In the grand scheme of things, it doesn't translate as a something positive for our personality system because the lack of emotional and physical connection we're experiencing interferes with our ability to access information regarding what it is that we want or need in the internal and external world. When a part is using this mode of behaviour, and it's dominant in our system, we are physically present but psychologically, and emotionally withdrawn. The many different degrees of detachment we go through can range from feeling a little spacey and bit out of it, experiencing a brief loss of focus in a particular interaction, all the way up to complete out of body dissociation.

In the more extreme versions of this mode, we feel numb, depressed, disconnected, and empty. This mode is usually designed to protect our vulnerable child from experiencing the painful feelings that may be triggered in the situation we're facing. This mode is quite a common protection mechanism for many people. In fact, we all experience a certain degree of the detached protector at some point in our lives, the most common being something known as "highway dissociation," where we arrive at a destination but have little to no recollection of the journey to get there. Unfortunately, if the more extreme ways of using this mode to cope with emotional experiences is learned at an early age, it can result in it becoming the one and only coping mode we use for all of our emotional experiences. This then leads to regular bouts of dissociation which has the potential to leave us feeling constantly numb, like we lose track of time, or we have an overall sense of confusion about life in general.

“There were times when my emotional state became too much to handle, and my system would begin to shut down. I experienced this as state of apathy which I later discovered, much to my surprise, was actually a complicated protection mechanism.”

~Steven Morris RP

Many people detach from their emotions without even realizing it, and I was no different when it came to this subconscious way of coping with unwanted and uncomfortable feelings. I regularly experienced my Detached Protector in its more minor representation as an overwhelming sense of apathy. This would usually show up as me being physically present to the circumstance I was in, but emotionally and psychologically withdrawn. I would communicate this severed state of being to the everyone in the outside world with outlandish statements like, "I really don't care what you think or do, it's entirely up to you." When I was blended with a part that was using this mode of behaviour, I really felt that I meant it too.

My Internal Critics would spend their time convincing me that the situation was no longer meaningful to my emotional well-being, so it was time to shut down and not care any more. In actuality, this was an attempt to keep me safe from what I thought was playing out in my environment, which was often nothing to do with what was actually going on. If I don't acknowledge my feelings then, in theory, they won't impact me. Obviously, this way of dealing with things was completely ineffective because it invalidated the parts of me that had thoughts and feelings about what was going on around me and it stopped me from accessing my own emotional and physical wants and needs.

Many people experience the more extreme versions of the Detached Protector, which can range from feeling a little spacey and out of it, to experiencing a brief loss of focus in an interaction, to complete emotional and cognitive dissociation. The Detached Protector is a common mode of behaviour that develops as a result of trauma, and if it is learned at an early age, it can become the "go to" coping mechanism for any and all emotional activity in your system. Learning how to deal with this protective part of your personality starts with appreciation. After all, this is a way of coping that has worked for you to some degree or another, and probably for a longer period of time than you may have been aware of. Living the Life you Want to Live means working towards Unconditional Self-Acceptance, and in order to work with this part, you must begin by appreciating how that part of you has been working to keep you safe.

Next, let's check in to see how you relate to this Mode in your own behaviours. Answer the questions below based on your personal experiences and the rating scale provided.

Never 0	Sometimes 1	50/50 2	Often 3	Always 4
Description				Score
I sometimes feel disconnected, numb, or completely detached from my life, with little to no contact with myself, my feelings or emotions, and other people.				
I often feel indifferent, even ambivalent about most things that are happening in my life. Sometimes, I have out of body experiences and lose track of time.				

Based on the scores you gave for the questions above, and the way you relate to the description provided on the previous pages, how Relevant is the Detached Protector Mode to you in your life? Add the two scores together to calculate your prevalence score. On a scale of 0 – 8, 0 being not present at all, and 8 being present in my life every day, rate your experience of the Detached Protector Mode.

My Detached Protector Mode has a prevalence score of ___/8.

On the next page, take the time to explore your experience of the Detached Protector Mode, see if you can identify how you feel when this Mode is active, how you are thinking when this Mode is active, what you do when this Mode is active, and what situations you might need to be aware of that can activate this way of thinking in your personality system.

- a. When I am in the Detached Protector Mode, I experience the following feelings (List the emotions you experience in the Detached Protector Mode, focus on the feelings in your system when you are lacking focus, drifting along, or even losing track of time).

- b. When I am in the Detached Protector Mode, I am having the following thoughts (List the thoughts you are having when you're in the Detached Protector Mode, be specific, focus on thoughts that point out how the story in your system is an accurate one, how the narrative has to be true, and how there is no alternative to what you are hearing).

- c. When I am in the Detached Protector Mode, I behave in the following ways (List the things you do, the way you act, and how you react when you're in the Detached Protector Mode).

- d. The following situations are likely to be involved in triggering my Detached Protector Mode (List the situations you are aware of that have activated this mode of behaviour in the past).

- e. When I am in the Detached Protector Mode, I can use the following skills to support me with the emotional distress I am experiencing in my personality system. List the different skills of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy you can use to manage the emotions being held by the Detached Protector Mode. Try to list the skills in the order they will be effective for you to use. Start with Mindfulness, then focus on Distress Tolerance, and then look at Emotion Regulation.

- f. The ways I can practice these skills to develop them as part of my ability to cope with the emotional experience of my own Detached Protector Mode are as follows: Describe the way you can practice these skills, what would it take to implement them into your daily routines?
