

Adjustment Disorder

When Life Falls Apart, Substances Fill the Gap



What is Adjustment Disorder?

Adjustment Disorder is an intense emotional and behavioral response to an identifiable life stressor (such as divorce, job loss, serious illness, or grief) that goes beyond what most people experience and disrupts daily functioning. Where others eventually adapt, someone with Adjustment Disorder remains overwhelmed, unable to regain footing without support.

What Does It Look Like?

- > **Emotional Overwhelm**
Reactions feel far out of proportion to what happened.
- > **Withdrawal from Daily Life**
They pull away from work, relationships, and routines.
- > **Inability to Function**
They struggle with tasks they managed easily before.
- > **Impulsive Decision-Making**
Desperate choices that deepen the original problem.

How Does Adjustment Disorder Contribute to Relapse?

When the emotional weight of a life crisis feels unmanageable, substances offer a form of relief. Stressors that persist harden the relief into dependence.

- 1) **The Stressor Often Outlasts Treatment**
Divorce, grief, illness: these rarely resolve in 30 days.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs Can't Build Real Coping Skills**
Lasting resilience requires sustained practice under real conditions.
- 3) **Without New Skills, the Same Pattern Returns**
They leave treatment facing the same circumstances, underprepared.

Prevalence:

5-21% of outpatient mental health patients¹

Co-Occurrence:

Significant risk of concurrent substance use disorder²

Relapse Risk:

Significant risk of relapse and treatment dropout³

Sources: ¹Casey P. CNS Drugs. 2009. Nov;23(11):927-38. ²Medscape eMedicine: Adjustment Disorders. Epidemiology. ³PMC: Comorbid psychiatric disorders in substance dependence patients.

Long-Term Treatment for Adjustment Disorder and Addiction

Adjustment Disorder ties substance use to an episode of grief, financial collapse, health crisis, or other traumatic event. The circumstances around their use are often still present after a short-term program has ended. Without real coping skills in place, relapse is likely.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** provides the time and structure to process the underlying stressors. Clients advance when they demonstrate real change in how they handle stress, loss, and uncertainty.



“You can’t process a devastating life event in 30 days. Working through grief, identity loss, and the fear of what comes next takes real time. Without that processing, the same pain leads back to the same solution.”

 **Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained**
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Adjustment Disorder

When Adjustment Disorder goes untreated, the pain and stress that drove substance use remain active. The next life challenge brings the same response.

- **Treating the Stressor, Not Just the Substance**
Unresolved crisis keeps the path back to use open.
- **Building Coping Skills Through Sustained Practice**
New responses to stress require time and repetition to hold.
- **Providing Enough Time to Stabilize**
Life restructuring after crisis cannot happen in weeks.

Dual Diagnosis:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation’s only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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