

Avoidant Personality Disorder (APD)

When Fear of Rejection Drives Self-Medication



What is Avoidant Personality Disorder?

Avoidant Personality Disorder is a mental health condition marked by extreme sensitivity to rejection, pervasive feelings of inadequacy, and an intense fear of judgment. People with APD desperately want connection but avoid relationships and social situations because the risk of being criticized or embarrassed feels unbearable.

What Does it Look Like?

- > **Social Withdrawal**
They turn down invitations, avoid gatherings, and increasingly isolate themselves from friends and family.
- > **Hypersensitivity to Criticism**
A minor comment or perceived slight can devastate them for days or even weeks.
- > **Chronic Feelings of Inadequacy**
They believe they are fundamentally flawed, unworthy of love, and inferior to others.
- > **Avoiding New Situations**
Job opportunities, relationships, or activities are declined out of fear of embarrassment or failure.

How Does APD Contribute to Relapse?

For someone with APD, social interactions feel like walking into a room to be silently judged by everyone. Substances provide temporary relief from their relentless inner critic.

- 1) **Social Anxiety Creates Tension**
Alcohol and drugs offer a shortcut to confidence and relief from the constant fear of rejection.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs Lack Depth**
Effective treatment requires social interaction and vulnerability that can't be built in a few weeks time.
- 3) **Without Treating APD, the Fear Remains**
They leave treatment still terrified of judgment and rejection, returning to substances to cope.

Prevalence:

2.4% of U.S. adults¹

Co-Occurrence:

35% develop an alcohol use disorder in their lifetime²

Relapse Risk:

4x More likely to develop SUDs than average³

Sources: ¹ NESARC (National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions), NIAAA.

² Grant et al., NESARC data on Cluster C personality disorders and alcohol use disorders. PMC.

³ Co-Occurrence of Personality Disorders and Substance Use Disorders. PMC

Long-Term Treatment for APD and Addiction

Effective treatment requires the social engagement and vulnerability that someone with APD fears most. Short-term programs don't allow enough time to build the trust needed for honest therapeutic work.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** provides the extended, structured environment where clients can learn that connection doesn't have to mean rejection. Clients advance through the program when they demonstrate genuine change in **how they relate to others and manage their fears** of judgment.



“The shame cycle in APD is relentless. They feel inadequate, so they isolate. Isolation leads to substance use, which leads to more shame. Breaking that cycle requires time to build a therapeutic relationships they can trust.”

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



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for APD

Without addressing the underlying fear of rejection and feelings of inadequacy, relapse risk is high. APD drives isolation and substance use; which further deepens shame and withdrawal, fueling use.

- **Treating Both Conditions Together**
Addressing only addiction leaves the fear and shame untreated.
- **Building Trust Gradually**
Someone with APD cannot form therapeutic relationships quickly. Time and consistency are required before honest work can begin.
- **Practicing Connection**
Long-term treatment provides daily opportunities to engage with others and learn that relationships can be safe.

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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