Coming back to myself

Depersonalization & derealization, and how I recovered — a personal story by S. Lewis

What DPDR is

Depersonalization is feeling detached from yourself, like watching your life from outside your body. Derealization is feeling that the world around you is unreal, foggy, or dreamlike. It is often the mind's protective response to stress, anxiety, or trauma. It is frightening, but it is not dangerous, and you are not losing your mind.

What it felt like for me

Mirrors felt strange. My voice sounded like someone else's. The world looked flat, like a film set behind glass. I spent hours checking whether I still felt 'real', which only made it stronger.

What helped me recover

- Learning it was anxiety, not insanity: the fear of the feeling kept it alive.
- Stopping the constant checking and letting the feeling be there.
- Getting back to normal life: work, friends, walks, even while it felt strange.
- Better sleep, less caffeine, and moving my body every day.
- Grounding: cold water, naming five things I could see, feeling my feet on the floor.
- Talking to a therapist and the people I trust.

If you're in it right now

You are not alone, and this does lift. Recovery is rarely a straight line. The fog thins slowly, often without you noticing, until one day you realize you've been present all afternoon.

Support and reliable information

My story is personal experience, not medical advice. For trustworthy information and professional help:

- Mind — Depersonalization and derealization: mind.org.uk — clear explanation of dissociation, DPDR, and treatment options.
- NHS — Dissociative disorders: nhs.uk — symptoms, causes, and how to get help through your doctor.
- Unreal: unrealuk.org — a UK charity run by people with lived experience of DPDR, with peer support.

If you're in crisis

If you're thinking about harming yourself or feel unsafe, please reach out now — these services are free and confidential:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (US): call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org
- Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741 (US & Canada)
- Samaritans (UK & Ireland): call 116 123, free, 24/7
- Worldwide: crisis centres and helplines at iasp.info/crisis-centres-helplines

Written by S. Lewis. This is a personal account of one person's experience with DPDR — it is not medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you're struggling, please reach out to a doctor or mental health professional.