

ABOUT BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a term used to describe a certain set of difficult experiences (symptoms) that some people have. The diagnosis of BPD is based on an assessment of these symptoms over time and across a range of situations.

Experiences of BPD include difficulties with: Emotions and strong overwhelming feelings

People with BPD describe overwhelming, almost constant emotional pain. Strong emotions are easily triggered such as anger, fear and sadness. Sometimes there can be a feeling of unreality or emptiness.

Relationships

People can experience strong and changeable feelings of love and hate, and great sensitivity to signs of rejection or criticism. Along with this goes a tendency not to trust people and difficulty coping with losses and separations.

Impulsive, often destructive behaviour

This often involves deliberate self-harm or suicide attempts in response to feeling emotionally overwhelmed. Self-harm can bring some momentary, short-term relief from suffering, however it has other long term negative consequences. Abuse of drugs or alcohol, binge eating and problem gambling may also be attempts at coping with feelings.

Fragile sense of self

This involves problems in experiencing or identifying a consistent sense of self or identity. When particularly stressed some people can withdraw, leaving them feeling vulnerable and alone.

"BPD for me once consisted of daily crises, scrambling for anything to numb the intense agony I couldn't seem to get away from. Nobody seemed to understand me no matter how I explained how I was feeling...."

BPD Survivor

MORE ABOUT BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Trauma and BPD

A history of trauma, abuse or deprivation is common. Many people have post-traumatic symptoms, such as nightmares, flashbacks, dissociative states (spacing out), panic symptoms and feelings of unreality.

For some people the negative, very critical experiences they have had can come back as internal, punishing self-talk or sometimes as voices. It is as if there is an actual voice outside (in the real world), making nasty, destructive comments that can be difficult to ignore. This is likely to be worse at times of increased stress.

How common is BPD?

It is estimated that at any point in time, 1.8% of the general population experience BPD. About 75% of these are females (males are more likely to be diagnosed with other disorders).

Discrimination and BPD

When someone deliberately hurts themselves as a way of coping, others find it hard to understand. Unfortunately because so little is known or understood about BPD, many people will at some stage come face to face with the prejudice and discrimination that result from this. This can be extremely alienating. It is vital to remember that BPD is a genuine condition and that help is available.

Will things get better?

Words often fail to describe just how difficult and overwhelmingly bad the experience associated with BPD can be. Sometimes the magnitude of the pain can feel so great that it is impossible to imagine that things can be better, even just a little. However, in spite of this negative experience **people do change and life does get better**. Remember you are not alone - others have felt like you and have learnt to cope.

"...Then with the right determination, things started to change. My case manager started working with me, doctors started hearing me and my will to take charge of this life of mine evolved..."

BPD Survivor

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Some ideas that other people have found helpful:

Attitude

- Be willing to try different things.
- Attend to what you can control.
- Every little step helps, even though it might feel hard or slow.
- Only you can do it but you can't do it alone.
- Note and build on positives in your life. Actively value what is good, or even just okay.
- Structure activities, have a daily routine. Structure is important to deal with overwhelming feelings and chaotic relationships.
- Avoid things that are self-destructive or that will make things worse and add more problems.

Health

- Keep healthy - this is a way of nurturing and caring for yourself. Eat well, get enough sleep and exercise.
- Have any medical condition treated and take your doctor's/ treating professional's advice.
- Sensible use of medication can help you get through the really difficult times. Medication prescribed for an as needed basis can be useful. Avoid relying on alcohol or drugs to make yourself feel better.

Feelings

- Remember the intense, awful feelings will pass eventually, just as everything in life doesn't stay the same forever.
- The urge to hurt oneself or someone else passes if you let it and each time you resist it is less likely to bother you.
- When you are upset, it is important that you not always react.
- When feeling distressed – try to settle yourself in very basic ways. Focus on breathing slowly...take slow normal breaths...notice the feeling of the air entering your lungs...leaving your chest... do it again and again.
- People have found it helpful to do an activity that distracts them eg exercise, listening to music.

These things may sound simple but they are not so easy to put into practice. Remember to be willing to give new ways a go...and start again and again, if need be.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? (continued)

Self-harm

Self-harm can serve several functions:

- It can be a way of coping with intolerable feelings.
- It can bring some momentary relief.
- It can be a way of communicating or demonstrating to others just how dreadful the feelings are.
- It can be a way of punishing yourself.
- It is important to try to understand why you self-harm.
- You can then find other ways to meet your needs in less destructive ways eg go for a walk, talk to someone until the urge passes.

Relationships and support from others

- Seek and use people and supports that you feel safe with.
- Take the time to build trust with other people.
- Repair your relationships, say you are sorry if you have something to apologise for.
- Learn to be assertive...stick up for yourself.

Treatment/therapy

- It can help settle down out-of-control feelings and behaviour.
- It can focus on helping you get a better sense of yourself, what you want and how to get there.
- You may feel a need to address past or current trauma. Don't tackle trauma until you feel you have found someone you feel is safe, and you feel confident that together you can cope with the strong feelings it will bring up.

Fundamental to treatment/therapy is the relationship between you and the therapist. This is an important relationship and you both need to work at maintaining it.

"...I'm not saying there aren't tough days, but instead of being a victim to it, I survive the crises, then get back up and fight for a life worth living. There's hope if you truly believe in it!"

BPD Survivor

WHAT CAN FRIENDS AND FAMILIES DO?

- Adopt a non-judgmental, interested, warm position (this doesn't mean you have to agree).
- Set limits (i.e. say "no" when you need to), but don't abandon the person with BPD.
- Accept that this is the way your loved one feels although you may not understand.

The following is a client's recommendations:

*"Learn all you can about the disorder: be realistic about how much support you can offer – this makes you more likely to stick around for the long haul: set limits and stick to them; don't fall into the trap of taking control."
BPD Survivor*

RESOURCES

If you have BPD or are a family member or carer, it is usually best to speak first to a GP or staff in your local area mental health service. Phone numbers for local community mental health services can be found by ringing your local public hospital or by accessing www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/index.htm

Supports

For Individuals:

- Your doctor (GP)
- Private psychiatrist/ therapist
- Community Health Centre - most have counsellors
- Community Mental Health Centres
- Life Line
Ph: 131 114
- Sane Helpline (info and referral line)
Ph: Freecall 1800 187 263
- Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council Inc (VMIAC)
Ph: (03) 9387 8317

For Families and Friends of People with BPD:

- Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill (ARAFEMI)
Ph: (03) 9810 9300
- Bouverie Centre – Victoria's Family Institute
Ph: (03) 9376 9844

Books

Refer to Spectrum website or ring Spectrum for a book list.

Internet sites

www.bpdresources.com

(This website has links to many useful sites)

SPECTRUM - The Personality Disorder Service For Victoria

Spectrum is a publicly funded service in Victoria established to support the treatment of people who meet the criteria for borderline or severe personality disorder. There is particular emphasis on those at risk from self-harm or suicide.

Spectrum provides the following services to individual clients:

- Community assessment and treatment
- Group treatment in selected locations
- Residential assessment and treatment

These services are available for people with a diagnosis of borderline or severe personality disorder who have a case manager or contact worker within their local area mental health service.

These individuals typically have severe interpersonal difficulties and a long history of self-harm and/or suicide attempts, and particularly complex needs.

Spectrum can provide treatment only to a small number of people. There are many other services across Victoria that provide treatment and support for people with borderline or severe personality disorder. The first place to look for treatment is listed in the supports section on the previous page.

Spectrum provides the following services to staff from Victorian area mental health services:

We support and work closely with staff through:

- Consultation
- Training

These services are available to staff in Victorian area mental health services who work with people who have borderline or severe personality disorder.



A member of Eastern Health
Melbourne, Australia

Contact details

Spectrum is located in East Ringwood and delivers services to the whole of Victoria.

Address: 4 Bona Street (PO Box 135)
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Borderline Personality Disorder

What is it? What can you do about it?

