

Borderline Personality Disorder Factsheet

Borderline Personality Disorder, or BPD, is a term used to describe a pattern of symptoms which certain people experience. Both genes and life experiences are thought to play a part in the development of BPD. The symptoms of BPD can be divided into four main groups:

- **Difficulties with emotions:** people with BPD often describe feeling overwhelmed by their emotions. They sometimes seem to respond to events with much more intense emotions than people without BPD. These intense emotions can also remain with the person for much longer than would be the case for many other people. Powerful feelings of often overwhelming anger, fear, shame, emptiness and sadness can be particular problems for people with BPD. Sometimes, other people may regard the events that trigger these intense emotional reactions as fairly minor and find the response of the BPD sufferer hard to understand.
- **Difficulties with being impulsive:** people with BPD frequently do things on the spur of the moment without thinking through the consequences. For example, they may spend much more than they can afford, engage in unsafe sex, put themselves in dangerous situations, drive recklessly, binge-eat or misuse drugs or alcohol. People with BPD may also harm themselves in various ways. This may be in an attempt to kill themselves, but BPD sufferers also report many other reasons for self-harm, including trying to manage their emotions, releasing unbearable tension or punishing themselves because they feel so bad.
- **Difficulties with ideas and thinking:** people with BPD sometimes describe difficulty with “knowing who they are”. They often have problems describing their likes or dislikes and sometimes have difficulty describing themselves. Frequently, however, BPD sufferers are clear in regarding themselves as bad or evil. Another common feature in BPD is that sufferers report a feeling of emptiness, which can mean that, even if things are generally going well, people with BPD rarely feel content or satisfied. At times of stress, people with BPD can become very suspicious and paranoid of others, or they may “tune out” from their surroundings, with a reduced awareness of what is happening around them. Both of these states can be very unpleasant and frightening.
- **Difficulties with relationships with others:** people with BPD often have intense relationships, perhaps with more extreme ups-and-downs than the relationships of people without BPD. Sometimes BPD sufferers can very quickly change their view of someone, from thinking that they are ideal one moment to thinking that they are worthless the next. Many people with BPD have a dread of being alone or of people abandoning them, and may go to great lengths to avoid these situations, including isolating themselves to avoid such situations altogether. Sometimes the ways in which BPD sufferers try to avoid being alone can push people away. Not infrequently, sufferers can avoid relationships altogether in an attempt to avoid potential abandonment.

The symptoms will typically be present from early adulthood and cause the person with BPD (and sometimes those around them) distress. Not everyone who is diagnosed with BPD will suffer from all these symptoms - many people will have some of these difficulties but will not have others. With the correct treatments, outcomes for people with BPD are better than for many other mental disorders.