
Borderline personality disorder

Summary

- Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a psychiatric condition.
 - People with BPD often have strong, overwhelming emotions and difficulty managing relationships.
 - BPD may cause a person to display extreme behaviours, such as self-harm, or have significant changes in mood.
 - BPD often occurs with other mental illnesses such as mood disorders, eating disorders and alcohol or drug abuse.
 - When this occurs, each condition must be recognised and treated separately.
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Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a type of psychiatric condition. People with BPD experience distressing emotional states, difficulty relating to other people and self-destructive behaviour.

About 1–4% of the population will develop BPD at some time in their lives. Women are more likely than men to develop BPD.

Symptoms of borderline personality disorder (BPD)

People with BPD have difficulty relating to other people and the world around them. Difficulties that people with BPD may experience include:

- idealising or devaluing other people
- constant, overwhelming emotional pain
- impulsive or self-destructive behaviours – such as spending sprees or engaging in unsafe sex or substance abuse
- intense outbursts of anger.

Extreme behaviour and BPD

People living with BPD may show extreme behaviour, such as intense changes in mood and repeated self-harm. There may be a variety of reasons for such behaviour. The person may feel that they are dependent on others for their identity, or may fear abandonment.

Extreme behaviours associated with BPD are often efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment. They are often dismissed as 'attention-seeking' or manipulation. However, these behaviours are symptoms of the disorder and require professional help. Family and other carers of people with BPD also need education and support.

Causes of BPD

The causes of BPD are unclear, but may involve a combination of:

- biological factors – for example, structural and functional changes in the brain
- genetic factors – for example, where a close family member, such as a parent or sibling, also lives with BPD
- environmental factors – for example, the person may have experienced trauma or loss. Traumatic experiences in early life are common in people living with BPD.

Treatment can reduce BPD symptoms

Treatment can help people manage, reduce or even eliminate symptoms of BPD.

Current effective treatments for BPD

Currently, the most effective treatments for BPD are:

- psychotherapy – a mental health professional talks with the person about their symptoms, and they discuss ways to cope with them
- psychosocial rehabilitation – helping people with BPD learn social skills
- medication – this may help reduce associated symptoms such as depression.

Treatment of associated conditions

BPD often occurs with:

- mood disorders (for example, bipolar disorder and depression)
- eating disorders
- alcohol or drug abuse.

It is essential that each of these disorders is recognised and treated separately.

Where to get help

- **Your GP (doctor)**
- **SANE** Help Centre Tel. **1800 18 7263** Monday to Friday, 10 am – 10 pm
- **SANE Help Centre Chat** – chat online with a mental health professional, Monday to Friday, 10 am – 10 pm
- **SANE peer support moderated forums**
- **Beyond Blue Support Service** Tel. **1300 22 4636**
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800**
- **Project Air Strategy**

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