

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Facts & Tips | Resources For Loved Ones

What is BPD?

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a mental health problem characterized by instability in several areas of life. Approximately 2-6% of people have BPD.

Symptoms of BPD

BPD has 9 symptoms. People need to have 5 of 9 to be diagnosed.

- Efforts to avoid abandonment.
- Unstable, "love-hate" relationships
- Unstable emotions
- Unstable identity
- Impulsive, possibly self-damaging behaviour (drug and alcohol use, binge eating, promiscuity, etc.)
- Self-injury or suicidal behaviour
- Dissociation and suspiciousness
- Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Problems with anger

Hope for BPD

- Nearly 50% of people with BPD recover over a 10-year period.
- There are effective treatments!



Challenges for Loved Ones

We've done a fair amount of work with loved ones of those with BPD (and other mental health problems), and we've observed several common experiences and reactions:

- Your relationship with your loved one feels like a roller coaster ride
- Feeling concerned and worried about your loved one's well being (sometimes because of suicide attempts or threats, drug/alcohol use, self-injury, or other risky behaviour)
- Guilt about things you may or may not have done
- Confusion about how your loved one developed BPD
- Uncertainty about when, how, or whether to talk with her or him about these difficulties
- Feelings of helplessness and powerlessness
- Sadness, sorrow, feelings of loss
- Feeling overwhelmed by the needs of your loved one

Quick Tips for Loved Ones



Helpful Books and Internet Resources

Books for Loved Ones

- Manning, S. (2011). *Loving Someone with Borderline Personality Disorder: How to Keep Out-of-Control Emotions from Destroying Your Relationship*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Chapman, A.L., & Gratz, K.L. (2013). *Borderline Personality Disorder: A guide for the newly diagnosed*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Chapman, A.L., & Gratz, K.L. *The Borderline Personality Disorder Survival Guide: Everything You Need to Know about Living with BPD*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Internet Resources

- National Education Alliance for BPD (www.borderlinepersonalitydisorder.com)
- TARA for Borderline Personality Disorder (www.tara4bpd.org)

Loved ones of those with BPD or other significant mental health problems often feel overwhelmed, confused, and unsure about how to provide support. While there is no simple solution to this problem, there are several things you can do to provide effective support:

- **Listen** - to what your loved one says, be open to her or his perspective, and try to figure out what she or he needs from you. Ask your loved one if she or he needs (a) just to be listened to/understood, or (b) advice or suggestions.
- **Validate** - Use active listening skills to convey that you're hearing and understanding what your loved one is communicating. Listen, wait until she or he is finished, and then show that you understand by paraphrasing what she or he just said.
- **Gently Encourage** - Encourage your loved one to seek help. You can't force this. Gently encourage your loved one to consider making a first appointment for an intake or assessment with a mental health professional. She/he can always decide not to continue, but after a first appointment, people often feel connected to their provider and willing to give it a try.
- **Don't Avoid** - Don't avoid bringing up difficult topics, because you're afraid of upsetting her/him. If there are difficulties around the home that need to be addressed, bring them up in a gentle and supportive manner, rather than avoiding the topic.
- **Avoid** - Avoid being defensive, critical or judgmental. People with BPD already are suffering intensely, they want to change, and they are often already very critical of themselves.
- **Take Action** - In an emergency, take action to try to keep your loved one safe. You may need to call the police, take the person to the hospital, contact her/his therapist or doctor, remove all medications or harmful substances, etc. People with BPD are at risk of attempting suicide or harming themselves. If you observe signs that your loved one is at risk, try to ensure her or his safety. Some warning signs are: talking about suicide, hoarding medications (e.g., for an overdose) or drugs, writing a goodbye or suicide note, talking about how life is hopeless, having made a recent suicide attempt (or several past attempts).