
Borderline Personality Disorder

What is Borderline Personality Disorder?

The symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder can be summarized as instability in mood, thinking, behavior, personal relations, and self-image. Individuals with the disorder may:

- demand constant attention and make unreasonable demands
- avoid being alone by acting out a crisis or dramatizing a problem
- display provocative behavior
- go on eating or spending binges
- threaten or attempt suicide
- cut, burn or scratch themselves
- have mood swings, brief periods of severe depression or anxiety, or intense anger over something minor
- engage in self-destructive behavior like reckless driving, or abuse of alcohol and other drugs
- say they are bored, life is empty, and they do not know who they are
- have delusions and slip temporarily into a psychosis

Many symptoms of Borderline Personality disorder are similar to those found in other disorders, such as anxiety disorder, schizophrenia and other personality disorders like:

- histrionic personality - self-dramatizing, self-indulgent, demanding, excitable, vain
- narcissistic personality - intolerant of criticism, self-important, lacking in empathy, envious, constantly demanding special favors
- antisocial personality- callous, reckless, impulsive, irritable, deceitful, and emotionally shallow.

Borderline Personality Disorder can affect anyone, but it is often diagnosed in adolescents and young adults. Women seem to develop it more often than men.

Possible Origins and Causes of Borderline Personality Disorder

The cause of Borderline Personality disorder is still unclear. Research shows that chemical imbalances in the brain and other biological factors may be involved, such as heredity. Childhood trauma, such as abuse and neglect, have also been cited as possible causes. People with personality disorders often use “defense mechanisms”, or coping strategies, that allow them to deny responsibility for their feelings and actions. One defense is called “splitting” – putting some people on a pedestal while devaluing others. Another defense is called “projective identification” - which involves denying one’s feelings, attributing them to someone else, and then behaving in a way that causes the other person to respond in kind. For example, when the borderline person’s hostility is reciprocated, they can think and/or act as though it were not their own.

Treatment Options

Psychotherapy is nearly always the chosen treatment, helping the individual recognize and control their behaviors and mood swings, and process negative thoughts and feelings. Personality disorders are long-standing methods of coping with the world, relationships, and emotions, that often do not work. Therefore, individuals with BPD usually require long-term, outpatient treatment. Medications can be used to help stabilize mood swings and impulsive behavior. Medication, though, is rarely effective without individual therapy and group or family therapy as the cornerstone.

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