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FACT SHEET

FOR FAMILY,
FRIENDS AND
YOUNG PEOPLE

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a term used to describe a pattern of problems that usually start during youth and affect most areas of life, causing the person significant distress over a number of years.



SYMPTOMS OF BPD

UNSTABLE EMOTIONS

People with BPD usually describe that their emotions and feelings change suddenly. One minute they feel okay, the next they feel very sad or angry or anxious. This is often confusing for the person with BPD and for other people. People with BPD often describe trouble controlling their temper and can feel angry very easily, resulting in fights or verbal or physical outbursts.

PROBLEMS WITH IDENTITY, SELF-IMAGE AND THINKING

People with BPD often describe feeling that they don't know who they really are or feel that their sense of who they are is unstable. Sometimes this is described as a disturbing feeling of being empty or 'hollow' inside. When stressed, people with BPD sometimes describe unusual experiences, such as feeling like suddenly everything is no longer real, like they are in a dream, or they might become overwhelmed by their suspicion of other people. These experiences usually go away when they are no longer feeling as stressed.

“ People with BPD usually describe acting before they think through the consequences of their actions ”

RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS

People with BPD often experience difficulties managing their relationships with others. Their relationships are often intense but stormy, with lots of break-ups and reunions. They can suddenly shift from feeling like others are 'perfect' to feeling angry, betrayed and let down. Some people with BPD describe a sense of panic when a relationship ends or even just at the thought that it might end. This can lead them to behave in desperate ways in order to stop people from leaving them.



BEHAVIOUR

People with BPD usually describe acting before they think through the consequences of their actions – this is impulsive behaviour. They often end up doing things that they later regret or take risks that are likely to lead to harmful consequences. This can involve spending money that they don't really have, unplanned or uncontrollable drug and alcohol use or taking risks with sexual behaviour. A common and serious form of impulsive behaviour in BPD involves repeated thoughts of suicide or repeated acts of deliberate self-harm, such as self-cutting or self-poisoning. A young person with BPD often does this during periods of intense distress, sadness, anger or irritability. They may describe using these methods to manage their feelings, and like other forms of impulsive behaviour, they often regret it later.

WHAT CAUSES BPD?

Scientific research tells us that personality characteristics are shaped by the interaction of the genes we are born with and the environment in which we grow up. Painful experiences, such as loss, abuse or other traumatic events are common in people who have BPD but there is no single 'cause' of BPD.

It's likely that a combination of factors leads to the development of BPD and that this combination might differ for each individual.

HOW COMMON IS BPD?

BPD occurs in approximately three per cent of young people. It is more common in females than males and also more common in young people than older people.

ISN'T THIS JUST 'NORMAL TEENAGE' BEHAVIOUR?

While any one of the problems described above might be familiar to young people, it's the number and severity of the problems that make BPD a mental health problem. BPD improves over time, but young people who have some or all of the features of BPD have an increased risk of serious problems that can continue into adulthood. These include persistent BPD, drug and alcohol problems, depression, relationship problems and suicide.

WHAT CAN TREATMENT DO?

Specialised mental health treatment for BPD is effective. Scientific research shows that early intervention for BPD is also effective. The early intervention approach to BPD aims to help young people with some or many of the features of BPD before problems become established. Young people with BPD may also have other mental health, social and educational or work difficulties at the same time, and these problems also need to be addressed.

“People with BPD often describe trouble controlling their temper and can feel angry very easily”

Further information

For further information regarding BPD:

WWW.BORDERLINEPERSONALITYDISORDER.COM
WWW.BPDDEMYSTIFIED.COM
WWW.BPDDFOUNDATION.ORG.AU
WWW.BPDCENTRAL.ORG
WWW.SPECTRUMBPD.COM.AU
WWW.MJTACC.COM
WWW.PROJECTAIRSTRATEGY.ORG
WWW.MINDAUSTRALIA.ORG.AU
WWW.ARAFEMI.ORG.AU
WWW.WELLWAYS.ORG
WWW.MIFA.ORG.AU
WWW.BETTERHEALTH.VIC.GOV.AU

For further information regarding mental health, or for information in other languages, visit:

WWW.ORYGEN.ORG.AU
WWW.HEADSPACE.ORG.AU
WWW.REACHOUT.COM
WWW.YOUTHBEYONDBLUE.COM
WWW.BEYONDBLUE.ORG.AU
WWW.SANE.ORG
WWW.HEALTHDIRECT.GOV.AU
WWW.OYH.ORG.AU

Related factsheets

[Self-harm and young people](#)

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Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to Country, which continue to be important to First Nations people living today.

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