

Borderline Personality Disorder

What is Borderline Personality Disorder?

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a serious mental illness marked by unstable moods, behavior and relationships. Because some people with severe borderline personality disorder have brief psychotic episodes, experts thought of this illness as atypical, or borderline, versions of other mental disorders. While mental health experts now generally agree that the name “borderline personality disorder” is misleading, a more accurate term does not exist yet. Most people who have borderline personality disorder suffer from:

- Problems with regulating emotions and thoughts;
- Impulsive and reckless behavior; and
- Unstable relationships with other people.

People with this disorder also have high rates of co-occurring disorders, such as depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse and eating disorders, along with self-harm, suicidal behaviors and completed suicides. Other illnesses that often occur with BPD include diabetes, high blood pressure, chronic back pain, arthritis and fibromyalgia. These conditions are associated with obesity, which is a common side effect of the medications prescribed to treat borderline personality disorder and other mental disorders.



Symptoms to look for:

According to the current DSM, to be diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, a person must show an enduring pattern of behavior that includes at least five of the following symptoms:

- Extreme reactions—including panic, depression, rage or frantic actions—to abandonment, whether real or perceived
- A pattern of intense and stormy relationships with family, friends and loved ones, often veering from extreme closeness and love (idealization) to extreme dislike or anger (devaluation)
- Distorted and unstable self-image or sense of self, which can result in sudden changes in feelings, opinions, values or plans and goals for the future (such as school or career choices)
- Impulsive and often dangerous behaviors, such as spending sprees, unsafe sex, substance abuse, reckless driving and binge eating
- Recurring suicidal behaviors or threats or self-harming behavior, such as cutting
- Intense and highly changeable moods, with each episode lasting from a few hours to a few days
- Chronic feelings of emptiness and/or boredom
- Inappropriate, intense anger or problems controlling anger
- Having stress-related paranoid thoughts or severe dissociative symptoms, such as feeling cut off from oneself, observing oneself from outside the body or losing touch with reality

Best Practices

Psychotherapy is usually the first treatment for people with borderline personality disorder. Types of psychotherapy include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Schema-focused therapy.

Screening Tools/Resources

Screening Tools:

The McLean Screening Instrument

Resources:

National Institute of Mental Health

nimh.nih.gov

National Alliance on Mental Illness

nami.org



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