

Supporting someone recovering from BPD

Family, whānau and friends have found the following tips useful:

- Recovery from BPD is a journey that can take time
- Learn what you can about the diagnosis, its treatment and what you can do to assist
- If you find yourself 'walking on eggshells' for fear of what the person with BPD might do or say, get some support for yourself
- Remember the person's distress is real – being judgmental or assuming they are 'attention-seeking' won't help; neither will giving in to every demand or taking responsibility for their lives. Get support for yourself to find a compassionate balance and the limits that work for you and for the person with BPD
- Remember, at times of loss and grief, emotions and relationships are especially difficult
- Find ways to look after yourself and maintain your own wellbeing

Get support from friends and whānau



Keep learning

Learn more about BPD and strategies that can help you. See websites such as healthnavigator.org.nz, and have a look at MHF book reviews at mentalhealth.org.nz/books.

Use digital tools available online to learn more and help you manage your symptoms: you can check out smallsteps.org.nz, thelowdown.co.nz, or justathought.co.nz. You can also try breathing, sleep or mindfulness apps on your phone.

Disclaimer

This brochure should not be used in place of an accurate diagnosis or assessment. If you think you may have Borderline Personality Disorder or would like further information or support, please talk to your GP or Māori health provider.

Free call or txt 1737 anytime for support from a trained counsellor. For a list of helplines, visit www.mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines.

Resources

The Mental Health Foundation has a range of information on mental health and wellbeing including pamphlets, postcards and CDs available to order from our website: shop.mentalhealth.org.nz.

Contact us

Resource & Information Service

Email: info@mentalhealth.org.nz

Mental Health Foundation

PO Box 10051, Dominion Road, Auckland 1466

Find us online: www.mentalhealth.org.nz

www.facebook.com/mentalhealthfoundationNZ

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Help us to help others

The Mental Health Foundation is a charity and we rely on donations to support our work. Please consider giving us a donation so that we can continue to help others. See www.mentalhealth.org.nz

This resource was produced with input from many people. Special thanks go to Jenni Beckett (www.bpdtherapy.co.nz).

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Borderline Personality Disorder



 **Mental Health Foundation**
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Our vision: a society where all people flourish.

What is Borderline Personality Disorder?

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is diagnosed in around 2% of adults and in up to 20% of people using mental health services. It is more commonly diagnosed in women than men.

It is often assumed that borderline means 'a marginal but not full-blown disorder'. This is not accurate. People with BPD are frequently in significant emotional pain. The name comes from the fact that it was originally thought to be on the 'border' between psychosis and neurosis. We now understand that people with BPD experience difficulty managing their feelings and this impacts on their relationships and behaviour.

What are the symptoms of Borderline PD?

People with BPD experience some or all of the following:

- Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment
- A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships
- Identity disturbance, unstable sense of self
- Impulsiveness (potentially self-damaging)
- Intense anger that does not fit with the situation, or difficulty controlling anger
- Recurrent suicidal behaviour and/or self-harm
- Reactive feelings and moods
- Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Experiencing minor problems as major crises
- 'Black and white' thinking which often means switching between love and hate in personal relationships
- The use of self-destructive coping mechanisms to express anger, frustration, desperation and dismay

These symptoms impact seriously on their lives and their relationships with others. People experiencing this disorder are often blamed for their symptoms but they are not at fault.



What causes BPD?

The causes are not fully understood but factors that may be important include:

- Emotional vulnerability – the person is 'finely tuned', emotionally sensitive and reactive. Of itself this is not a problem, but when this is combined with an environment that does not fit with this sensitivity, it can make it hard for the person to learn how to manage their feelings
- Sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse, especially in childhood and adolescence
- Emotional neglect or attachment difficulties in childhood, separation and loss
- An 'invalidating environment' where feelings are denied, ridiculed, ignored or judged as 'wrong'

What are the treatments for BPD?

The primary treatment for BPD is psychotherapy. Successful therapy should:

- Be well structured and have a clear focus
- Provide a framework for coping with distress
- Be well-integrated with other services
- Not blame or criticise
- Treat you as capable (not fragile)
- Emphasise hope and recovery

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is especially helpful for BPD. It can help people manage distress and regulate their emotions.

If DBT is not available to you, you can also learn and practice the skills through books and videos, or as part of a support group.

Medication can supplement other treatment and is used to target specific symptoms, for example:

- Anti-depressants to reduce depressive symptoms
- Mood stabilisers to help reduce extremes of mood
- Anti-psychotics to reduce perceptual disturbance

What does recovery from BPD look like?

Recovery does not mean a 'cure'. For some people, aspects of BPD may always be present in their lives. They may fluctuate in intensity over time. With help though, you will learn to manage these experiences and live a good, full, happy life.

Strategies for recovery

People who are diagnosed with BPD have found the following strategies useful:

- Remind yourself to 'check the facts' – although your feelings are real to you, they may not be based in the facts of your situation. Learn about how feelings work and what helps regulate their intensity.
- Learn about ways that you can manage distress without making it worse, i.e. without self-harming (for example with drugs or alcohol) or harming relationships with others.
- Work out what a 'life worth living' would look like for you and start working on steps towards that. What would you like to be doing with your time? What sorts of relationships and friendships would you like to have? What's a small first step you can take?
- It takes time and practice to find new ways of coping that don't involve self-harming or risky behaviour. Ask yourself how long you've been 'practising' the old ways, before you give up on the chance to get used to new ways of managing your feelings.
- Work on meeting your physical and spiritual needs – this helps you cope better with your emotions. For example, it is hard for anyone to manage their feelings when they're hungry, tired or unwell.
- Be part of developing a plan to maintain wellness, to manage emotional crises and to work on stopping risky behaviour. Health professionals involved with you can help with this.
- Take an active part, as far as possible, in decisions about treatment and support. This ensures you can make informed choices about what is best for you.
- Therapy takes time – try to stick with it and let your therapist know what you're finding difficult. If you drop out of treatment, you should always keep trying to return.
- Take medication as prescribed to make sure it has a chance to work, and discuss side effects to the medication with your GP.
- Get the continuing support of friends and family who know about BPD and understand what they can do to support you.
- Get support and understanding from culturally appropriate support groups, organisations or advocates (trained supporters).