

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER



What is Borderline Personality Disorder?

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a mental health condition characterised by intense and unpredictable emotions and an unstable sense of self. BPD is very treatable and many people with BPD live a full and positive life.

People who live with BPD may struggle to maintain relationships and often deal with strong fears about being rejected or abandoned. Sometimes, their actions to cope with these emotions can seem reckless or impulsive to others.

BPD symptoms can make daily life difficult, but they can be managed well with treatment, tools and support.

BPD is diagnosed in around 2% of adults who have had contact with mental health services. It is more commonly diagnosed in women, though this may reflect gender biases. Men presenting similar symptoms may be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other mental health conditions.

What are the symptoms of BPD?

People with BPD can experience a range of different symptoms including:

- Intense and quick-changing emotions, such as sadness, anger, panic and shame
- Ongoing feelings of emptiness or loneliness
- Impulsive or risky behaviour such as overspending, self-harm, unsafe sex, heavy drinking or drug use, or dangerous driving
- Feeling very afraid of being abandoned
- Seeing relationships in extremes, such as 'all good' or 'all bad', with rapid changes in behaviour towards others
- A sense of identity that is based on other people, rather than feeling secure in yourself
- Recurring suicidal thoughts or self-harming
- Feeling paranoid or disconnected from reality, especially during times of extreme stress.

In crisis?

If someone is in immediate danger, **call 111** or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

To call your local mental health crisis team, see [mentalhealth.org.nz/help](https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/help)

What causes BPD?

The exact causes are not fully understood, but for many (but not all) people with BPD, traumatic events have played a role in their lives. BPD may develop due to two key factors:

- **Traumatic life experiences, especially in childhood or youth:** such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect, the loss of a parent or caregiver, or growing up in a home with conflict or unstable relationships.
- **Family history:** having a close family member (such as parent or sibling) with BPD or another related mental health condition.

Neurodiversity and other challenges

Some people can experience BPD as well as being neurodivergent, i.e. having autism and/or ADHD. Some of the symptoms and experiences can overlap.

BPD can also occur alongside other mental health challenges, such as eating disorders, anxiety and depression.

Getting a diagnosis

If you are dealing with any of these experiences, talk to your GP. They can refer you to a qualified mental health professional who can assess, diagnose and support you.

“When I was diagnosed, I needed to know that the diagnosis was not an illness. It was a way that professionals could categorise what might be useful for me to learn to navigate life.”

Person living with BPD

What are the treatments for BPD?

The main treatment for BPD is psychotherapy or talk therapy, including dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT), schema-focussed therapy or mentalisation-based therapy.

DBT teaches ways to regulate your emotions, cope with distress and understand relationships better. For more information visit **dbt.tools**, or to find a service or therapist visit **mentalhealth.org.nz/accessing-services**.

Whichever therapy you choose, it should be evidence-based, and make you feel understood and supported. Therapy takes time – try to stick with it. Don't give up if one therapist doesn't work out, keep trying.

Medication can be helpful to treat conditions that may occur alongside BPD, such as depression. Talk to your medical professional about what medication could work for you.

What does recovery from BPD look like?

People living with BPD are likely to have emotional sensitivity, and to feel things deeply and intensely, throughout their lives. Symptoms may fluctuate over time. With help, they can learn how to manage these experiences and live a rich, meaningful life. Many people reach a point where they no longer meet the diagnostic criteria for BPD.

"I thought that there was something wrong with my personality. But I found that I could learn new things. My brain was not broken. Brains can create new pathways, and I could learn new ways of doing things. But that takes time."

Person living with BPD

Helpful strategies for managing BPD

People who live with BPD have found specific strategies and skills useful. To learn more about them, visit nowmattersnow.org or dbt.tools, and find videos at www.youtube.com/dbtru

- Learn **crisis skills** to use when emotions become overwhelming. For example, try to change your temperature, do some quick exercises or use paced breathing. See TIP skills at [youtube.com/dbtru](https://www.youtube.com/dbtru)
- When you feel ready, try to **check the facts**. Although your feelings are real, they may not match the facts of the situation.
- Try using '**opposite action**' for emotions that aren't helpful. For example, if you feel angry and want to snap at someone, try to walk away instead.

It will also help to remember:

- Looking after your body can help you cope better with emotions. Try to **eat and sleep well**, keep a good routine, and do activities or exercise to lower stress.
- Take medication as prescribed so it has a chance to work. Talk to your GP about any side effects.
- **Peer support groups** can connect you with others who have similar experiences. Find support group listings here: mentalhealth.org.nz/groups
- Set realistic goals. Do what you can, when you can.
- **Let others know** what situations you may find hard. Being open will help them understand how they can support you.

Supporting someone who lives with BPD

Whānau and friends have found the following tips useful:

- Learn about BPD, its treatments and how to offer support from an evidence-based source.
- Ask the person what it is like for them. Listen and validate what they share. Remember their pain and distress are real. Ask how you can best support them.
- Take their feelings seriously, while also helping them respond more effectively to the feeling. Learn about **emotional regulation skills** together.
- Remember, people with BPD can take words and actions personally. Take note of what typically 'triggers' intense emotions and plan how to manage these feelings together. Try not to take reactions personally – see it as a work in progress.
- Be aware of **stigma and judgement** about people living with BPD, including from some health professionals.
- Connect with family support groups, locally or online. Find support organisations such as Yellow Brick Road (yellowbrickroad.org.nz) and find out about Family Connections courses (familyconnections.org.nz).
- **Look after your own wellbeing** too. Take time out for yourself so you can be there for others. See mentalhealth.org.nz/supporting-others



**Get support
from friends
and whānau**

Keep learning

Visit [mentalhealth.org.nz](https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz) for more free information, tools and guidance. Also see [healthify.nz](https://www.healthify.nz) and [depression.org.nz](https://www.depression.org.nz). Visit your library for books on mental health and wellbeing.

Online tools

Use free digital tools and support programmes available online. Check out [smallsteps.org.nz](https://www.smallsteps.org.nz), [thelowdown.co.nz](https://www.thelowdown.co.nz), [headstrong.org.nz](https://www.headstrong.org.nz) or [justathought.co.nz](https://www.justathought.co.nz)

A website that is especially useful for people living with BPD is [nowmattersnow.org](https://www.nowmattersnow.org). You can find tools and worksheets at [dbt.tools](https://www.dbt.tools), and short videos that teach DBT skills at www.youtube.com/dbtru

Helplines

Talking through problems with a trained professional can help. Call or txt **1737** to speak to a trained counsellor 24/7.

More helplines can be found at:
[mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines](https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines)

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.

Resources

The Mental Health Foundation has a range of free mental health and wellbeing information and resources. Visit [shop.mentalhealth.org.nz](https://www.shop.mentalhealth.org.nz)

Find us online

To find out more about our work, visit:

 resource@mentalhealth.org.nz

 www.mentalhealth.org.nz

 mhfnz

 [mentalhealthfoundationNZ](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthfoundationNZ)

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