

Borderline Personality Disorder

The main feature of borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a pervasive pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, self-image and emotions. People with borderline personality disorder are also usually very impulsive.

This disorder occurs in most by early adulthood. The unstable pattern of interacting with others has persisted for years and is usually closely related to the person's self-image and early social interactions. The pattern is present in a variety of settings (e.g., not just at work or home) and often is accompanied by a similar lability (fluctuating back and forth, sometimes in a quick manner) in a person's emotions and feelings. Relationships and the person's emotion may often be characterized as being shallow.

A person with this disorder will also often exhibit impulsive behaviors and have a majority of the following symptoms:

- **Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment**
- **A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships** characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation
- **Identity disturbance**, such as a significant and persistent unstable self-image or sense of self
- **Impulsivity** in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, [binge eating](#))
- **Recurrent suicidal behavior**, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behavior
- **Emotional instability** due to significant reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or [anxiety](#) usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days)
- **Chronic feelings of emptiness**
- **Inappropriate, intense anger** or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights)
- **Transient, stress-related paranoid thoughts** or severe dissociative symptoms

As with all personality disorders, the person must be at least 18 years old before they can be diagnosed with it.

Borderline personality disorder is more prevalent in females (75 percent of diagnoses made are in females). It is thought that borderline personality disorder affects approximately 2 percent of the general population.

Like most personality disorders, borderline personality disorder typically will decrease in intensity with age, with many people experiencing few of the most extreme symptoms by the time they are in the 40s or 50s.

Details about Borderline Personality Disorder Symptoms

Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.

The perception of impending separation or rejection, or the loss of external structure, can lead to profound changes in self-image, emotion, thinking and behavior. Someone with borderline personality disorder will be very sensitive to things happening around them in their environment. They experience intense abandonment fears and inappropriate anger, even when faced with a realistic separation or when there are unavoidable changes in plans. For instance, becoming very angry with someone for being a few minutes late or having to cancel a lunch date. People with borderline personality disorder

may believe that this abandonment implies that they are “bad.” These abandonment fears are related to an intolerance of being alone and a need to have other people with them. Their frantic efforts to avoid abandonment may include impulsive actions such as self-mutilating or suicidal behaviors.

Unstable and intense relationships.

People with borderline personality disorder may idealize potential caregivers or lovers at the first or second meeting, demand to spend a lot of time together, and share the most intimate details early in a relationship. However, they may switch quickly from idealizing other people to devaluing them, feeling that the other person does not care enough, does not give enough, is not “there” enough. These individuals can empathize with and nurture other people, but only with the expectation that the other person will “be there” in return to meet their own needs on demand. These individuals are prone to sudden and dramatic shifts in their view of others, who may alternately be seen as beneficent supports or as cruelly punitive. Such shifts often reflect disillusionment with a caregiver whose nurturing qualities had been idealized or whose rejection or abandonment is expected.

Identity disturbance.

There are sudden and dramatic shifts in self-image, characterized by shifting goals, values and vocational aspirations. There may be sudden changes in opinions and plans about career, sexual identity, values and types of friends. These individuals may suddenly change from the role of a needy supplicant for help to a righteous avenger of past mistreatment. Although they usually have a self-image that is based on being bad or evil, individuals with borderline personality disorder may at times have feelings that they do not exist at all. Such experiences usually occur in situations in which the individual feels a lack of a meaningful relationship, nurturing and support. These individuals may show worse performance in unstructured work or school situations.

How is Borderline Personality Disorder Diagnosed?

Personality disorders such as borderline personality disorder are typically diagnosed by a trained mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist. Family physicians and general practitioners are generally not trained or well-equipped to make this type of psychological diagnosis. So while you can initially consult a family physician about this problem, they should refer you to a mental health professional for diagnosis and treatment. There are no laboratory, blood or genetic tests that are used to diagnose borderline personality disorder.

Many people with borderline personality disorder don’t seek out treatment. People with personality disorders, in general, do not often seek out treatment until the disorder starts to significantly interfere or otherwise impact a person’s life. This most often happens when a person’s coping resources are stretched too thin to deal with stress or other life events.

A diagnosis for borderline personality disorder is made by a mental health professional comparing your symptoms and life history with those listed here. They will make a determination whether your symptoms meet the criteria necessary for a personality disorder diagnosis.

Causes of Borderline Personality Disorder

Researchers today don’t know what causes borderline personality disorder. There are many theories, however, about the possible causes of borderline personality disorder. Most professionals subscribe to a biopsychosocial model of causation — that is, the causes of are likely due to biological and genetic factors, social factors (such as how a person interacts in their early development with their family and friends and other children), and psychological factors (the individual’s personality and temperament,

shaped by their environment and learned coping skills to deal with stress). This suggests that no single factor is responsible — rather, it is the complex and likely intertwined nature of all three factors that are important. If a person has this personality disorder, research suggests that there is a slightly increased risk for this disorder to be “passed down” to their children.

Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder

Treatment of borderline personality disorder typically involves long-term [psychotherapy](#) with a therapist that has experience in treating this kind of personality disorder. [Medications](#) may also be prescribed to help with specific troubling and debilitating symptoms.