

# Personality Disorders

Personality Disorder is a complex diagnosis.

Personality describes the traits and quirks which make each of us unique. This is what determines how we think, feel and act as well as how we respond to different situations.

Usually we have a series of behaviours which together define our personality. As a result we may be described as shy, lively or selfish. Although our personality is fairly predictable and doesn't change very much it does develop as we have different relationships and learn from our experiences.

People with a personality disorder have a more limited range of emotions, attitudes and behaviours and these behaviours are more difficult to change.

Personality disorders usually become apparent in adolescence or early adulthood although they can start earlier. It is thought that a number of factors contribute to the development of a personality disorder. These include genetics, biology and environment although childhood trauma, neglect or abuse is often a common. If these factors occur when our personality and coping skills are developing, then over time a personality disorder may emerge. A personality disorder often reflects the way a person has tried to adapt and cope with the circumstances they have experienced.

Approximately one in 10 people have a personality disorder although for the majority of people, the symptoms will not be severe.

## What are the main symptoms?

People with personality disorder often present with lots of problems, and often with everything seeming to go wrong all at once. Core symptoms are:

- Strong emotional responses – emotions feel particularly strong, are hard to understand or explain. This often means people are more sensitive to how they perceive they are being treated.
- Self-harming – the overwhelming feelings people experience can lead them to self harm or attempting to shut down emotions altogether as a way of managing them.
- Impulsive behaviours

People with a personality disorder may also participate in risky behaviours including excessive use of street drugs or alcohol, sexual indiscretions, spending sprees, reckless driving for example.

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There is also evidence that people with a personality disorder are more likely to visit their GP or hospital with both physical and emotional symptoms.

Sometimes people can be prone to misperceptions and suspiciousness or even paranoia. Less commonly, during particular times of emotional turmoil, people can even experience hallucinations; hearing or seeing things that are not really there.

### How is personality disorder treated?

Not everyone needs treatment and treatment options will vary from person to person. The best evidence for reducing distress and improving wellbeing is from individual or group psychotherapeutic work. This could include dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), cognitive analytic therapy (CAT) or mindfulness.

Some people with personality disorder also have depression, anxiety or paranoia and medication may help with these symptoms but there is limited evidence for this - see NICE guidance.

### How to support someone you care about with a personality disorder?

Find out as much as you can about their particular personality disorder.

One of the biggest things you can do is always believe the person and take them seriously. If they confide in you that are struggling to cope or are feeling suicidal – validate their feels and try not to make them feel rejected or dismissed.

Listening to how they are feeling can be enormously helpful. You could work with them on a safety plan which includes some key contacts and make sure this is somewhere handy. as well as ensuring they have a safety plan in place with certain

contacts in easy reach such as their CPN or the out of hours team.

### Other Sources of Information and Support

#### NHS in non-emergencies

Tel: 111

#### Samaritans

Tel:116 123

jo@samaritans.org

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

#### Mind

0300 123 3393

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

#### The Site

*Coping with self-harm and childhood abuse*

[www.thesite.org](http://www.thesite.org)

#### Middle Path

*Awareness, compassion and support for borderline personality disorder*

<http://www.middle-path.org>

#### Out of the Fog

*For relatives of people with personality disorders*

<http://outofthefog.website/>