

# Personality Disorders

The different ways in which an individual thinks, feels, behaves and interacts with others make up their 'personality'. Characteristics develop as people are growing up and by the time people reach their early 'twenties' they usually have their own unique personality.

Some people develop traits which are particularly prominent and can persistently cause problems in their lives. If these problems significantly interfere with the individual's ability to live their life then we call this a Personality Disorder. These problems often start during the teenage years and people notice that particular behaviours or feelings repeatedly make life difficult for themselves and those around them. It is thought that around 1 in 20 people in the UK suffers from a Personality Disorder (1).

## Different types of personality disorder

Symptoms of personality disorder vary. There are several different types but below are some of the key symptoms of the most common:

- Emotionally Unstable (Borderline): intense but unstable relationships, impulsiveness, self-harm, may hear

voices or have visual hallucinations when stressed, very 'up and down' emotions.

- Antisocial: don't care much about others' feelings, easily made angry, may commit crimes, lack of remorse, aggression.
- Dependent: often feel abandoned by others, feel 'incompetent' alone, rely on others to make decisions.

## Causes

A combination of genetics, early childhood experiences and the environment an individual grows up in can make them more likely to develop a personality disorder.

Factors such as experiencing violence or other abuse as a child, chaotic upbringing or neglect have all been shown to increase likelihood of personality disorder developing.

## Treatment

In the past there has been debate over whether or not mental health services can offer any useful treatment for Personality Disorders but it has become clear that we can and should.

1 Coid, J. et al. (2006) Prevalence and correlates of personality disorder in Great Britain. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 188, 423-431

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Talking therapies are the mainstay of treatment. These involve talking to a therapist about your thoughts and behaviours in order to understand them better and develop ways of managing them. As well as individual therapy there may be group sessions with other people suffering with similar problems. The main therapies are Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (particularly for Borderline Personality Disorder), Cognitive Analytic Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

People with a personality disorder may also suffer from other mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. These may require treatment with therapy or medication and as they improve, the personality disorder may also be more controllable.

With treatment and support many people can start to lead a more fulfilling life and deal with their difficulties better.

## How to Get Help

If you are worried about you or someone close to you, the first step is to visit your GP. They may need to refer you to a mental health professional, a Psychiatrist who can make a diagnosis and management plan.

**There are many websites with further information and support:**

### Emergence

Organisation led by service users providing support for patients and carers

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

### Mind

Great information about symptoms, causes and treatments.

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

### Samaritans

Support available 24 hours a day, every day.

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

**Helpline: 08457 90 90 90**