

# *Information for children about*



# *Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)*

How to use this booklet:

This information booklet has been produced for children, to assist in providing information to them about their parent's mental illness and how the illness may affect them and their family. It is designed as an aid to facilitate discussion between children, their parents, family members, other carers and a key worker, if available.

This booklet is divided into two parts. The first, for you, the adult (parent, friend or worker) and the second part for you to read to and discuss with the child.

It is understood that children of all ages benefit from being given information and an opportunity to talk and understand their experiences of their parent's mental illness in an age appropriate way. It is important to discuss all aspects of BPD sensitively, respectfully and to support the child and parent's ongoing relationship.

Understanding a diagnosis of BPD can be very difficult for everyone and can be especially challenging for children. Often children are left out of any information or support loop and as a result are left feeling confused, worried, and potentially vulnerable. The consequence of this can be that in trying to make sense of what is happening they may blame themselves for their parent's illness.

Many behaviours related to BPD can be very frightening to others especially anger and self-harm if it is occurring. This can be difficult for children to understand and speak about. It can be helpful for children to understand symptoms, warning signs, have language and terms to describe what they see is happening and, importantly, to know that they are not to blame.

It can be helpful to develop a mutually agreed upon action plan for times of crises with involvement from the person with BPD, their family/children and others likely to be involved. Ideally this plan would be developed at a time when the parent is well and able to contribute positively. The plan should include who to contact, who to go to and what to take if children need to stay with friends or relatives. Relevant telephone contacts (including 24 hour emergency numbers) should be rehearsed with the children, with clearly legible phone numbers attached to a spot where they cannot be lost.

The plan may also include ideas and activities that the child can do when feeling distressed and will help them feel safe and that they find soothing. Examples include having a warm bath, listening to music, phoning a friend or other trusted adult to ask for help or support. Children may need reassurance and confirmation of their feelings and to know that what is happening is not their fault.

Adapted by the Australian BPD Foundation and Rose Cuff (The Bouverie Centre)  
in consultation with staff and members from an information sheet originally written by Rose Cuff.  
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[www.bpdfoundation.org.au](http://www.bpdfoundation.org.au)*

# What is personality?

The way you think  
The way you feel  
The way you behave  
The way you ARE!

# What does it effect?

Your moods  
Your relationships  
At home, school, or anywhere!

# What is a Personality Disorder?

Personality disorder is a mental illness.

Just like other parts of our bodies that might get unwell like our lungs if you experience asthma, our brains can also experience 'unwellness'.



People affected by a personality disorder often have times when they feel very distressed or upset. They may show changes in their thinking, feelings and behaviour.

This can affect how they get along with people, how they manage stress and can sometimes mean they hurt themselves (more on this later).

It can make parents act differently. It is the disorder that does this and it is not your fault. With support and treatment most people can do all the things they ever hoped for.

What can it effect?

- **Ways of thinking** (how you make sense of things and understand other people and events)
- **Feelings** (intense and often changing feelings and responses that may not make sense)
- **Impulses** ( 'not thought through' behaviours like putting yourself in harm's way or becoming very angry very quickly)
- **Relationships** (Difficulties getting along with people at work, at home or with friends )

This illness is quite common.

It also affects different people in different ways.

There are many different types of personality disorder. The one that is most common is called Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

# Borderline Personality Disorder

and

## people with BPD

People, who have BPD or an illness that has 'bits' of BPD, have often had trouble coping with stress for a long time. To make things more difficult it can sometimes be very hard to get the right kind of help.

### What is it like for someone with BPD?



Having BPD can mean they may have times when they feel insecure, scared and chaotic, like an out-of-control kind of feeling. This may mean they seem 'up and down' most of the time. Sometimes people say it is a bit like living your life on a 'rollercoaster' but without the fun parts.

People with BPD sometimes feel really bad about themselves or about something that has happened in their life. They can find it hard to find anything good about anything or anyone. They may feel sad one moment and happy the next and it can be very hard for you to understand their change in mood. They often feel very worried or anxious too. Sometimes the way they are behaving may change very suddenly and may confuse and frighten you. Later, they are quite often very sorry and try to make it up to you.

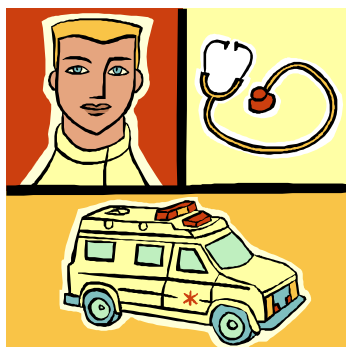
It can affect people so badly that they seem to have trouble coping with very simple problems and may seem to behave in ways that make no sense to you. This may even be by hurting themselves or those around them (even the people they care about most). At times they can also act well and this can be confusing if this happens off and on.



Remember people can get help to learn other ways of managing their stress.

## What about hurting themselves?

Some people with BPD can feel so sad and critical about themselves that they talk about feeling hopeless about their life. Sometimes they will do things to hurt themselves. This can be by cutting themselves, burning themselves, throwing things, hitting themselves or by taking too many tablets or alcohol.



For a while, these actions seem to help them cope with the horrible way they feel inside. The relief may not last for long and can be very scary for everybody around them.

Sometimes they may actually hurt themselves so badly that they may need some extra help immediately. They may talk about life not being worth living which can be very scary.

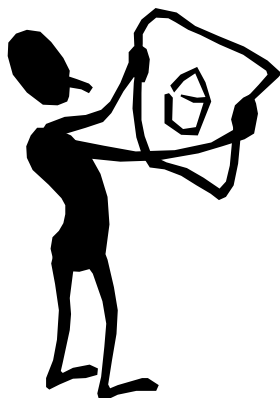
At times like this that you need to bring out your action plan and contact one of the people on your list or an emergency service (see below).

## What if I am scared?

If you are very frightened, worried or scared it is very important to speak to another adult that you feel safe talking to - perhaps your other parent, a grandparent, aunty or uncle, a neighbour, your teacher or one of your mother or father's friends. It is a good idea to let your parent know you are doing this.



When your mother or father is calm it is helpful to work out an action plan of what you can do or where to go to get help when you are frightened.



The plan should include:

1. the contact details of at least 2 or 3 people you feel safe to talk to or go to for help
2. in case you need to leave the house, what you should take with you (e.g. teddy, uniform, etc.)
3. how to let your parent know that you are leaving –maybe a note in an agreed place or an SMS.
4. If you have pets who you need to tell that no-one will be home so they

will be looked after too.

Remember, your mum is still your mum and your dad is still your dad and they love you very much.

## Is it my fault?

Although this may seem very confusing it is important to understand that this is part of the illness and it is NOT your fault. You are NOT to blame. You are not the cause or the reason and you do not have to think you are the only one who can help them.



All parents can find it hard to be parents sometimes! Managing a mental illness like BPD can make it even harder and there may be times when your Mum or Dad will struggle. They may also feel guilty too. Remember that it is not their fault that they have a mental illness either.

## Will my parent get better? What helps them?

There are special people, doctors and therapists, who have learnt how to treat Borderline Personality Disorder. The treatment may take a long time and your mother or father may seem better for a while and then suddenly go back to the old ways. This can be upsetting and confusing. But keep in mind that, with time and with the right treatment and support they can get better.



People who have BPD enjoy lots of the things everyone does like seeing friends, having fun, and doing relaxing things. Sometimes things like large crowded spaces, certain events or people can be very stressful for them. Ask your parent or someone you trust to help you work out what these are.

It is very important that you find ways to keep doing the things that are important and helpful for you, like going to school or work, finding time to have fun, relax, spending time with your friends and family, including your unwell parent.

It is not your job to fix the problem. You can be kind and helpful. Sometimes giving a hug is enough!

## YOU are important



## Where can I go to for support or more information?



call 1800 55 1800

For children and young people aged from 5-25 years



call 13 11 14

[www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp](http://www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp)

**Australian BPD Foundation:** Young carers page  
[http://bpdfoundation.org.au/young\\_carers\\_15.html](http://bpdfoundation.org.au/young_carers_15.html)

**COPMI:** Children of Parents with a Mental Illness - a comprehensive website offering information for young people, parents & families and professionals about mental illness. Includes a number of books to read to young children to help explain mental illness.

<http://www.copmi.net.au/>

**It's All Right** is about dealing with mental illness. Put together by SANE, it lots of easy to understand information. <http://www.itsallright.org/>

**Reachout!** is a website for young people and covers a whole range of topics. It includes a forum where young people can talk to other young people.

A space for you to write or draw things that make you feel good.

**Information about me**

My name is . . . . .

I live at . . . . .

In an emergency or I feel really frightened I can ring:



The Melways map reference for my home is:

Ask for an ambulance if mum and dad are unable to talk to you

Ask for police if you are really scared

Do what the person who answers tells you to do. Help will come soon

**IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS**

eg Mum's / Dad's mobile	XX XX XXX XXX Speed dial number 1

**People I feel safe talking to and their phone numbers**


Things I need to take with me if I need to stay with someone:

Eg teddy, toothbrush etc. On Tuesdays I have swimming so I will need to take my bathers etc

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If you have pets who do you need to tell so they can be looked after too?

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