

Making Everything Easier!™

Borderline Personality Disorder

FOR
DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Recognize and understand the symptoms of BPD
- Choose the best forms of treatment
- Overcome obstacles to change
- Find support for loved ones

Charles H. Elliott, PhD

Founding Fellow, Academy of Cognitive Therapy

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***Borderline
Personality Disorder***
FOR
DUMMIES®

**by Charles H. Elliott, PhD
Laura L. Smith, PhD**



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Dedication

We dedicate this book to our children and their spouses: Alli, Brian, Grant, Nathan, Sara, and Trevor. And, of course, to our grandchildren: Alaina, Cade, Carter, and Lauren. Thanks for the excitement.

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Introduction

Sometimes we watch a news show that features a daily commentary called “Worst Person in the World.” During this segment, the reporter chooses a few people who’ve said or done something that he thinks deserves his haughty contempt. Not so long ago, many mental health professionals may have labeled people with borderline personality disorder (BPD) as “Worst Patients in the World.”

Until recently, no one knew which treatments really help people with BPD. Furthermore, people with BPD are incredibly scary to treat because they tend to have a lot of rage directed at themselves, the people they care about, the world, and even their doctors and therapists. Borderline rage can occur anywhere and anytime. Mental health professionals want to protect and help their clients, but people with BPD are hard to keep safe and frequently block therapists’ best efforts. In fact, about 75 percent of people who have BPD hurt themselves in some way, and one out of ten succeeds in suicide.

On the other hand, if you’re lucky enough to treat, know, or care about someone with BPD, you may want to consider that person one of the “Best People in the World.” People with BPD can be highly intelligent, enthusiastic, and kind. Some therapists find that persistent effort over time results in a surprisingly gratifying metamorphosis in their patients with BPD.

The contrast between the good and bad in a person with BPD is like the contrast between black and white. Or, as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said about the girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead:

*When she was good,
She was very good indeed,
But when she was bad she was horrid.*

About This Book

If you or someone you care about suffers from BPD, we appreciate the challenges and painful obstacles you face. The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive look at the symptoms, causes, and treatment of BPD. We strive to help people who have BPD and the people who care about them gain understanding about this complicated mental illness. Because treating

BPD requires professional intervention, this book isn't designed as a stand-alone self-help program. However, you can certainly use it as an adjunct to psychotherapy. We share the belief with other professionals that clients benefit from being informed about their disorders, the suspected causes, and the treatments that work.

An Important Message to Our Readers

People with BPD often have greatly heightened sensitivity to criticism and disapproval. Thus, we're aware that a few of you are likely to take offense to the *For Dummies* part of this book's title. From time to time, people approach us and express concern about the meaning of *For Dummies*. We understand the concern. *Borderline Personality Disorder For Dummies* is our sixth psychology book in the *For Dummies* series. Our intent is to produce books that cover topics that an intelligent audience wants to know about without all the jargon and the technicalities.

Thus, we humbly offer you a clear, comprehensive overview of BPD. We vow to make this coverage serious and in-depth.

Conventions Used in This Book

We believe that stories and examples provide the best way to convey many ideas. Therefore, we use a lot of examples to illustrate our points throughout this book. The stories and cases we describe here represent composites of people with BPD whom we've known in our personal lives as well as in our practices. However, none of these stories depicts a true, recognizable portrayal of a specific person. Any resemblance to a specific person, alive or deceased, is completely coincidental. We bold the names of the individuals affected by BPD in each story the first time they appear to highlight that a case example is unfolding.

Borderline personality disorder is a bit of a mouthful, so we shorten the term to BPD throughout this book. In addition, we often use phrases like "most people with BPD" or "people with BPD generally do this or that." We absolutely realize that BPD plays out differently in each person. In some ways, there's no such thing as "typical" or "most" in the BPD world. However, we'd need another thousand pages to thoroughly discuss each variant and permutation involved in BPD. (See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the many symptom constellations of BPD.) So, just to be clear, we don't mean "everyone who has BPD" every time we say "most."

If you're using this book in collaboration with a therapist, we suggest that you take notes and write out your responses to the exercises we provide — whether on your computer, Blackberry, or iPhone or in an old-fashioned notebook. You probably also want to password protect or guard your material because, after all, your notes are for you (and your therapist) and no one else.

What You're Not to Read

We stuff this book with loads of information about BPD, and we lay it out so you can pick and choose what to read in any order you like. Use the table of contents and index to jump into whatever you want to know. Or, take the conventional route of starting with Chapter 1 and reading straight through from there.

Sidebars contain information about interesting studies or other stuff that we think is intriguing, but, in truth, not critical for understanding the material in the rest of the chapter. Sections marked as Technical Stuff are similar to sidebars, but they relate specifically to the discussion in the chapter they appear in. You can skip those, too, if you want.

Foolish Assumptions

We're going to take a wild guess here and assume that most people who read this book are interested in BPD. That interest may stem from your own emotional issues, or you may have concerns for someone you care about who has BPD-like symptoms.

On the other hand, you may be a professional who's looking for some accessible information that you can pass along to your clients. Or, maybe you want a few hints about dealing with difficult therapeutic issues. You may also be a student of psychology, counseling, social work, or psychiatry looking for a clear introduction to this complex problem.

How This Book Is Organized

We divide *Borderline Personality Disorder For Dummies* into seven parts with 28 chapters, plus two appendixes. Here's a brief overview of each part.

Part I: Mapping the Boundaries of Borderline Personality Disorder

Part I introduces you to the notion of personality and its connection to BPD. Chapter 2 takes a close look at the characteristics that make up a healthy versus an unhealthy personality. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the symptoms of BPD compared to the symptoms of other types of personality disorders, such as paranoid, narcissistic, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders. We also discuss some of the other emotional problems that often accompany BPD. Chapter 4 describes the cultural, biological, and psychological causes of BPD.

Part II: Taking Note of the Major BPD Symptoms

The six chapters in this part explore the major areas of dysfunction associated with BPD: impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, identity problems, relationship conflicts, thinking styles, and difficulties in perception. This material helps you more fully appreciate the magnitude of the issues that people with BPD must deal with in their everyday lives. If you have BPD, this understanding can help you identify the key areas of your life that you may need to work on. If you care about someone who has BPD, this in-depth exploration can clear up the confusion you've probably been experiencing for a long time.

Part III: Making the Choice to Change

Part III prepares you for treating or dealing with BPD. People with BPD and their loved ones need to know what treatments are available and which ones mental health professionals have found to be effective. Chapter 11 reviews the types of BPD treatment and the various mental health professionals available to provide these treatments. Chapter 12 describes the common obstacles that people must overcome before engaging in treatment. Chapter 13 illustrates how to explain BPD to other people and helps you decide just how much you want to reveal to whom. Chapter 14 looks at keeping physically healthy during the treatment process.

Part IV: Treatments for BPD

In this part, we draw from the various treatment strategies that professionals have found to be effective for BPD and apply them to the core areas of dysfunction that people with BPD exhibit. Chapter 15 discusses how to address problems associated with impulsivity, including self-harm and risk taking. Chapter 16 shows various strategies for improving your ability to regulate out-of-control emotions. Chapter 17 reviews ways to develop a clear sense of identity. Chapter 18 takes a look at how people with BPD can improve their abilities to put themselves in other people's shoes. Chapter 19 provides ways to form more adaptive states of mind and new types of thinking. Finally, Chapter 20 discusses some of the medication options associated with treating BPD.

Part V: Advice for People Who Care

This part is for people who encounter others who have BPD. Chapter 21 tells partners how to set limits and relate more effectively to the ones they care about who have BPD. Chapter 22 speaks to people who have friends with BPD. Chapter 23 discusses what parents who may have adolescents with emerging BPD can do and what they need to look for in their kids. Chapter 24 talks to adults who grew up with BPD parents and attempts to show them how to relate and better understand their parents. Finally, Chapter 25 talks to mental health professionals who treat people with BPD.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

This part gives you some quick tips on calming hot emotions. We also tell you ten ways to say you're sorry. Finally, we list ten things *not* to do when you're trying to overcome your BPD.

Part VII: Appendixes

Appendix A offers numerous resources for more information and help. Appendix B provides several blank forms and exercises that we reference in other parts of the book.

Icons Used in This Book



This icon appears to alert you to a specific insight or strategy for dealing with BPD.



This icon warns you about possible pitfalls or dangers that you need to be on the lookout for.



This icon highlights the take-away message. Pay attention to paragraphs marked with this icon.



This icon marks stuff that you don't have to read unless you're interested. We provide a little extra explanation next to this icon for those of you who like to delve into the discussion a little more.

Where to Go from Here

We intend *Borderline Personality Disorder For Dummies* to provide a comprehensive overview of this complex emotional and behavioral problem. Most readers without BPD will find that this information helps them to better understand the problem and to know how to relate to people with BPD better than they did before. People in close relationships with people who have BPD may find that a therapist can provide additional support.

If you have BPD, this book will help you better understand yourself and the people you care about. However, we strongly recommend that you also enlist the help of a mental health professional who is trained in treating BPD. BPD is one problem you don't want to deal with on your own.

If you're a therapist, this book can help you spot people with BPD more quickly and set better boundaries when you're treating them. However, if you're new to the treatment of BPD, you'll definitely want additional training and education about this disorder.

Part I

Mapping the Boundaries of Borderline Personality Disorder

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"You're so intolerant and I can't stand that!"

In this part . . .

In this part, we provide an overview of what borderline personality disorder (BPD) is and briefly discuss a couple of treatment options. We also discuss what a healthy personality looks like to help you better understand what's missing for people who have BPD. We describe the major symptoms of BPD and cover the major causes of this complicated disorder.

Chapter 1

Exploring Borderline Personality Disorder

In This Chapter

- ▶ Taking a look at the characteristics of BPD
 - ▶ Searching for BPD's causes
 - ▶ Calculating the costs of BPD
 - ▶ Seeking help for BPD through psychotherapy and medication
 - ▶ Knowing how to help someone who has BPD
-

A charming, exciting, intimate, intelligent, fun person suddenly turns mean, sluggish, angry, self-defeating, and dismal — a radical change in an instant for no obvious reason. What causes the unpredictable ups and downs from fear to rage, intimate intensity to distance, and drama to downfall that some people experience on a daily basis? Borderline personality disorder (BPD), the most common and debilitating of all the personality disorders, causes chaos and anguish for both the people who suffer from the disorder and those who care about them.

This book takes you inside the world of BPD and shows you what living with this disorder is really like. Unlike some books and articles about BPD, we strive to maintain a compassionate, kind perspective of those people who are afflicted with BPD. You may be reading this book because you know or suspect you have BPD or some of its major symptoms. If so, expect to find a wealth of information about BPD, its causes, and some effective treatments.

Perhaps you're a reader who cares about or loves someone who has BPD. By reading this book, you can discover why people with BPD do what they do as well as see how you can better relate to them. Finally, even if you're not in a close relationship with someone with BPD, you no doubt have a co-worker, neighbor, supervisor, or acquaintance who suffers from BPD, or at the very least, a few of its prominent symptoms. Even superficial relationships with people who have BPD can pose surprising challenges. This book can help you better understand what's going on and how to deal with the problems BPD creates for you.

If you're a therapist, you can use this book to expand your understanding of BPD. You can see how to deal with difficult therapeutic issues. You can also figure out how to set better boundaries while you simultaneously take care of both yourself and your clients.

In this chapter, we describe the basics of BPD in terms of how the disorder affects both the people who have it and the people who have relationships with them. We present what's known about the causes of BPD. We also tally up the costs of BPD for both the people who have it and the society they live in. Finally, we overview the major treatment options for BPD and show those of you who care about someone with BPD what you can do to help.

Breaking Down Borderline Personality Disorder

Personalities are the relatively consistent ways in which people feel, behave, think, and relate to others. Your personality reflects the ways in which other people generally describe you — such as calm, anxious, easily angered, mellow, thoughtful, impulsive, inquisitive, or standoffish. All people differ from their *usual* personalities from time to time, but, for the most part, personalities remain fairly stable over time (check out Chapter 2 for more on personality).

For example, consider someone who has a generally jolly personality; this person enjoys life and people. However, when this person experiences a tragedy, you expect to see normal grief and sadness in this generally jolly person. On the other hand, someone with a personality disorder, such as BPD, experiences pervasive, ongoing trouble with emotions, behaviors, thoughts, and/or relationships. The following sections describe the core problems that people with BPD frequently experience.



The American Psychiatric Association has a manual that describes specific symptoms of BPD. The manual groups these symptoms into nine categories. Here, we condense these nine categories into four larger arenas of life functioning that are impacted by the symptoms of BPD in one way or another.



Although BPD has an identifiable set of symptoms, the specific symptoms and the intensity of those symptoms varies greatly from person to person. Chapter 3 reviews each of the nine symptom categories separately and covers how BPD manifests itself in a wide variety of presentations.