

Personality Disorders

What are Personality Disorders?

Everyone's personality is unique. Personalities develop as people go through different life experiences, and most people are flexible enough to learn from past experiences and change their behaviour when needed.

If you have a personality disorder, however, this is much harder. A person will be diagnosed with having a personality disorder if they have extreme thoughts and behaviours – so extreme that they have a lot of trouble coping with day to day life. People with personality disorders get very strong feelings that they can't ignore, and which cause them to act in a way that they can't control no matter what is going on around them. They have trouble relating to situations and other people, and often end up experiencing significant problems and limitations in their relationships, social encounters, work and schooling.

What causes Personality Disorders?

A personality disorder is a serious condition, and the exact causes haven't been figured out yet. However, certain things can contribute to whether you develop a personality disorder, including:

- Family history of personality disorders or other mental illnesses
- Experiencing abuse or neglect during childhood
- An unstable or chaotic family life when you're young
- Being diagnosed with childhood conduct disorder
- Loss of parents through death, or a traumatic divorce when you were young
- Another significant trauma

People with a personality disorder don't choose to feel the way they do, and are in no way responsible for developing a disorder.

Do I have a Personality Disorder?

Some signs a person has a personality disorder include:

- Frequent mood swings
- Being extremely dependent on other people
- Narcissism (when you admire yourself and your appearance)
- Stormy relationships
- Social isolation
- Angry outbursts
- Suspicion and mistrust of others

- Difficulty making friends
- A need for instant gratification
- Poor impulse control
- Alcohol or substance abuse

Don't get too alarmed if you see some of these personality traits in yourself. A lot of people have different personality quirks. In fact, personality disorders aren't diagnosed until 18 years of age because our personality is still in development up to this point. What's different about personality disorders is that a person's behaviour will be extreme – and they usually aren't able to adapt or change it.

Types of personality disorders

Some of the different types of personality disorders are:

- **Antisocial personality disorder:** Not caring about others to the point of being aggressive and violent, or violating other people's rights.
- **Avoidant personality disorder:** Being hypersensitive to criticism or rejection, and experiencing extreme shyness.
- **Borderline personality disorder:** Being extremely impulsive, taking huge risks, experiencing significant distress, having an explosive temper and having unstable moods.
- **Narcissistic personality disorder:** Believing that you're better than everyone.
- **Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder:** Being extremely controlling, preoccupied with perfection, rules and orderliness, and unable to let broken/old stuff be thrown away.
- **Schizotypal personality disorder:** Not really caring about other people and having unusual thoughts such as "magical thinking" – that is, believing you can influence people and events through your thoughts.

People with personality disorders don't always realise they have a disorder – because their way of thinking and behaviour seems so natural to them. Because of this, they often blame other people for the challenges they face in day to day life.

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What can I do?

The best way to manage personality disorders is through:

- Psychological therapy
- Support from family, friends and the community
- Medication in some circumstances

Personality disorders are really difficult to deal with on your own, so if you're worried about having a personality disorder it's a good idea to visit your GP. It will make the process of diagnosing and managing the disorder much easier and quicker if you seek professional help and figure out a treatment plan that works for you.

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