

19 Signs You Grew Up With Borderline Personality Disorder

By Sarah Schuster

Staff

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Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a highly stigmatized and misunderstood mental illness that affects about 14 million Americans, or 5.9 percent of adults in the U.S. But because the symptoms usually first occur while a person is a teenager or in their early 20s, it's too easy to dismiss those early signs as "bad behavior" or "teenage angst," when in actuality the person is really struggling.

To find out some ways people knew (in hindsight) they had borderline personality disorder, we asked people who live with it in our community to share what it was like to grow up with undiagnosed, or maybe not-yet-developed, borderline personality disorder.

Here's what they had to say:

1. "Ever since I can remember, even as far back as first grade, I have always been extremely sensitive to everything. I remember I would always feel different and really alone... Looking back, it really set in around age 14. That's when the anger started coming out, the abuse of drugs and alcohol, the impulsivity, very rocky relationships — basically all the symptoms of BPD. I'm 20 years old now and I have gotten some aspects under control, but it's still a battle I fight every day." — Julia F.
2. "The impulsiveness, reckless behavior and trouble maintaining healthy relationships. The black-and-white thinking, self-harming behaviors... pushing and pulling people in and out of my life." — Melissa R.
3. "I always thought I just felt everything a lot more than other people. I would get super excited about things other kids didn't seem to care about. I can remember jumping up and down because my team scored a point and looking around wondering why no one else was as excited as me. I was told over and over to calm down, be quiet and even when I expressed outrage over an injustice, I was told there is nothing I can do." — Melanie M.
4. "A friend of mine, who I thought was my BFF, wanted to sit next to another girl in class next. When she told me that, I threw myself on the ground and cried my heart out as I thought she hated me. In that moment I hated her with my very soul. I was crying for days because of that." — Lenka W.
5. "It was like no matter how good things were, I could always find a negative in everything... [it was like the] wall that was up was always getting higher could never reach it." — Stephen J.
6. "Extreme sensitivity. I would idealize people, then push them away. I had the biggest fear of abandonment. Anger would consume me, and I felt I could not get rid of it unless I self-harmed. Then, I would feel horribly guilty and ashamed about it. I remember scratching at my face and hair as early as 4, I think." — Amy W.

- 7.** “Going from being best friends with someone to hating their guts, and then going back to being best friends after a while... My self-harm as a teenager... having only two to three close friends growing up. I found it very hard to make and keep friends. I was very emotionally sensitive and would get hurt easily. All these things I can see now as signs of my BPD.” — Michelle M.
- 8.** “I was only diagnosed a year ago, but looking back it all makes sense. As far back as I can remember, I was extremely sensitive, had highly fluctuating moods including intense anger and I would self-harm. I would freak out over any sudden changes in plans, and I was terrified of abandonment. It wasn’t until years later I realized it was something much more than just depression and anxiety.” — Kelsey M.
- 9.** “Making impulsive, life-changing decisions without thinking through the consequences, moving from city to city and job to job thinking my problems would go away if I moved to another city. I now have a very unstable work history and am finding it very difficult to find employment.” — Pam M.
- 10.** “Dissociation. Feeling like you’re out of your body — like it’s not even yours, is the most terrifying feelings ever, and was the main symptom/sign that I had something different from depression. Nobody ever really talks about dissociation, and I have no idea why, it horrified me more than anxiety attacks ever did. It’s like this huge seemingly endless brain fog. You can’t think, you can’t talk, you just can’t function. You feel completely numb from the inside and out. To me it gets so bad it feels like I don’t ‘exist,’ and it’s terrifying. Especially when you think you’re the only one who felt this way (which was the case for me for months).” — Alexis W.
- 11.** “I felt like I’d always be alone, like I was not worthy of having friends. I’m in a better place now and have been in treatment for five months.” — Isobel T.
- 12.** “Being extremely sensitive, wanting to be everybody’s best friend, being insanely hard on myself, thinking everyone was talking about me behind my back, loving people way too much, being co-dependent, thinking in absolutes, being very black and white, constant fear of abandonment.” — Marissa L.
- 13.** “My whole life I have been extremely sensitive. If an adult so much as raised their voice a little, I would burst into tears. I also once I hit puberty could never seem to have a steady relationship with peers. My friendships were always very up and down and one-sided especially as I became a teenager. I never had a self-esteem and I started cutting when I was 13. I was misdiagnosed with depression and anxiety first. I always wondered why I was so different, why weren’t other kids like me? Now it makes perfect sense.” — Jessie B.
- 14.** “Black/white thinking. Am I a good/bad person? I love/hate you. Don’t ever leave me/I want be on my own. With everyone of these issues it is extreme and intense, there is no middle ground, no balance or stability.” — Roma S.
- 15.** “It was a constant up and down. I didn’t have steady friendships. I felt insecure and had a low self-esteem. Oftentimes social interactions induced intense emotions that completely overwhelmed me and made me feel isolated and invisible. I felt anchor-less and didn’t know where I belonged or if I would ever find someone who would love and understand me. I was so afraid of my friends leaving me that I tried everything to make them love me. I started self-harming at 14, desperately trying to keep me grounded and gaining recognition.” — Mona B.

16. “As far back as I can remember as a little kid I’d deliberately push people away to test their limits and kind of prove to myself that I wasn’t a lovable person. As a teenager it mainly showed in my complete inability to handle breakups and extreme impulsivity, self-harm, constant suicidal thoughts, etc. This was all shrugged off by everyone around me as ‘being a teenager’ and ‘attention seeking.’ As a result I struggled for years without treatment. I’m still in shock that I survived that to be honest.” — Lucy R.

17. “I have had a serious problem with overspending money and self-harm. I would get so emotional at things that were not even real (fictional things or playful things) and the constant changes of my moods were hard for me to handle. Now I have been diagnosed with BPD and as I look back I see that I’ve had this for quite some time. It feels good to have a name for it now.” — Mackenzi D.

18. “I felt alone, unwanted and so different.” — Seth B.

19. “Definitely getting overemotional at almost everything. Sensitivity to violence, I couldn’t even handle violent TV shows like CSI. Even reading books would put immediately in a mood related to the book — it would make me happy or sad depending on how it ended. I was and still am more sensitive in my interactions with people. I would get easily upset even if they didn’t mean to upset me. I thought for years that something was wrong with who I am. That everything about me was wrong and it was all my fault. Even at age 9 I was self-harming. I hated myself and had no self-confidence. I was dual diagnosed with borderline and bipolar at age 19, and everything finally made sense. All the things I thought were wrong with myself actually had a name. Not that that made it any easier to accept. I’m now 24, and I’m finally starting to accept this is just how I was made. And it’s not my fault.” — Meghan W.

*Some answers have been edited for length or clarity.

<https://themighty.com/2016/12/how-do-you-know-if-you-have-borderline-personality-disorder/>