

## **BPD: Overcoming BPD as a Family**

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a disorder that affects the whole family, not just the person with the diagnosis. It may be difficult to wrap our heads around the fact that people with BPD are doing the best they can with the coping skills they know and that they don't choose to react the way they do. No-one wakes up in the morning looking forward to screaming at people, or feeling that suicide is a viable option rather than continuing another day with their emotional pain. You may not know or understand what that emotional pain is, or where it comes from, or even believe that whatever it is could possibly be such a big deal. But for whatever reason - usually a combination of biological (how the brain is wired) and environmental (what the person has experienced) factors – the reality is that *the person with BPD feels bigger and longer* than a person without BPD. Think of it as this ... one person can step into a steaming hot tub and it feels fine to them, yet another person can only handle a lukewarm bath – neither person chooses which maximum temperature their body can sit in comfortably. It's a similar idea with BPD, only on an emotional level. Some people with BPD have described it as feeling like their emotional skin has been burned so even the slightest bump is painful and stings for a long time.

The good news is that a person with BPD can be given the skills to cope with their emotions through good therapy, a lot of time to practice those skills, and support and understanding from those around them. This combination is the most effective path to success.

Just as the person in BPD treatment must apply themselves to the task of mastering new skills, so must the people around them if we are to see the best possible results for everyone. There are things we can do to help, but it involves changing how we think of BPD and how we interact with the person with BPD. The number one thing we can do is to keep ourselves healthy. Eat well, get your rest, exercise, and do things for yourself that make you happy. By being healthy it is easier to maintain our ability to support our family member effectively, and prevent ourselves from escalating our own emotions when confronted with BPD-related conflicts.

It is not always easy to cope with the continual crises and emotional upheaval that seem inherent to living with a person with Borderline Personality Disorder. When we know how to communicate more effectively and address our own role in contributing to problems, we can begin to move toward more fulfilling relationships and less conflict. Telling a person with BPD to “stop crying” or “stop yelling” is like sticking a lid on a pot that's ready to boil over – it could explode all over you. It is important to understand that *validating* someone's feelings *does not mean you are condoning* their behavior. Think of it as acknowledging that you hear their intense emotion.

### **De-escalating Emotional Situations**

There are 3 recommended ways to help de-escalate ourselves and the person with Borderline Personality Disorder:

1. When a person with BPD is elevating emotionally and becoming more distressed, do as much validating as you can in order to bring emotionality down and create a space where the person may open up a bit to being helped.
2. Regulate your own emotions. Stop in the moment to recognize and identify your own emotions. This will automatically help you regain your own emotional stability and allow you to engage with the person with BPD in a productive manner.
3. Get support. It is often a lonely place to be in when you are coping with a family member who has BPD. There are others who know what you're going through. Find them and create a support system for yourself.