

What Exactly Does ‘Splitting’ Mean?



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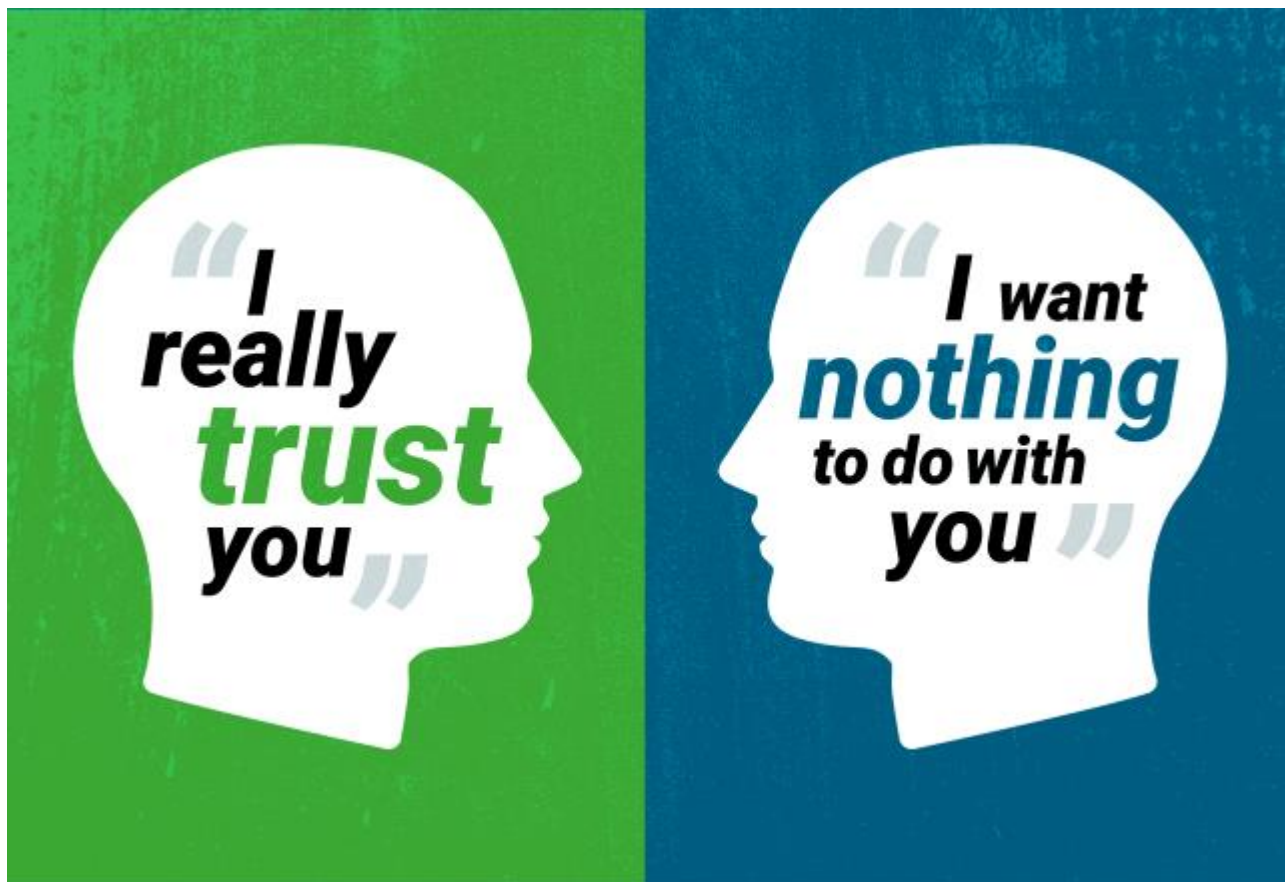
You've probably heard about 'black and white thinking' in Borderline Personality Disorder. It's one of the typical symptoms of BPD that is also may be called 'all or nothing', love/hate, us/them, and most commonly, 'black and white thinking'. But the official psychological term for this symptom is 'splitting' and it's actually not unique to BPD, because most people experience splitting sometimes, but **with BPD, splitting may happen the majority of the time, if not all the time**. For us people with BPD, it seems like it's sort of ingrained in us, the natural way our brain works (it's actually one of the nine criteria used to diagnose BPD).

**GOODBAD
LOVEHATE
WHITEBLACK
ALLNOTHING**

So... here comes the question: what is splitting?

It's the **inability to see the dichotomy of both positive and negative aspects of our thoughts**. Everything is either good or bad, there's no middle ground. All of our thoughts (or most of them) are polarized, it's either terrible or amazing, but nowhere in between. The term 'splitting' is used in psychiatry to describe the inability to hold opposing thoughts, feelings or beliefs. In other words, it's a distorted way of thinking in which positive or negative attributes of a person or event are neither weighed or cohesive.

So, yes, **splitting is considered a defense mechanism** in which people with BPD can view people, events or even ourselves in ‘all or nothing’ terms. Of course this can interfere with relationships and lead to intense self destructive behaviors. People who ‘split’ are often seen as overly dramatic, but the truth is that this defense mechanism -supposedly- protects us from disappointment, anxiety and intense emotions. The reality is that most of the time, it is the splitting that causes us emotional turmoil.



What do people who split frequently need?

Splitting patients need a psychiatrist who is a constant, continuing and empathic force in their lives. Someone who can listen and handle being the target of intense rage and idealization, but at the same time, someone who can define limits and boundaries with firmness. Patients with BPD need someone who can understand and accept them, and not be overwhelmed by their needs, fears and anxieties.

The challenge to the therapists is not to be driven away physically or emotionally, but rather to engage with the patient in a constructive and consistent exploration of their behaviors, no matter how intense these are.

In order to **heal from Borderline Personality Disorder splitting**, we must begin to see alternative explanations and ways of explaining the situations in front of us. It means beginning to see the **reality** of the situation, rather than “this” or “that”.

The greatest challenge for any sufferer of BPD is to begin to see the world with shades of gray AND a whole beautiful color palette. It is also our challenge to see other human beings in this way. It’s about holding space for the good and bad parts that exist within all of us.