

Facing the Facts about Borderline Personality Disorder



Excerpts from the ABCs of BPD

Borderline
Personality
Disorder
for Beginners

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MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP

At least six to nine million people in North America have Borderline Personality Disorder, and 30 million family members or more care about someone with BPD.

Yet BPD remains largely unknown, especially when compared to more publicized, yet much less common conditions. BPD is more common than Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia put together. Fifty percent more people have BPD than have Alzheimer's disease. BPD is *twice* as prevalent as the eating disorder Anorexia.

To better define a relationship with a borderline personality please *The Evolution of the BPD Relationship*.

<http://www.borderline-personality-disorder.info/thumbnails/articles.htm>

People who care about someone with BPD are usually in a great deal of pain. Staying in the relationship is difficult as it seems unbearable. But leaving seems unthinkable or impossible. If you feel this way, you are not alone. Nearly every non-BP we spoke with echoed the same sentiments. But you do have options, even if you cannot see them right now. This section is designed to help you think through your choices and come to a personal decision that feels right for you.

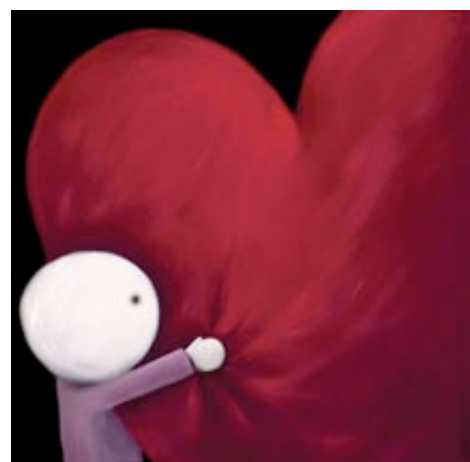
PREDICTABLE STAGES

People who love someone with BPD seem to go through similar stages. The longer the relationship has lasted, the longer each stage seems to take. Although these are listed in the general order in which people go through them, the vast majority of people do move back and forth between stages as well.

1. The confusion stage: This generally occurs before the diagnosis is known. Non-BPs struggle to understand why borderlines sometimes behave in ways that seem to

make no sense. They look for solutions that seem elusive, blame themselves, or resign themselves to living in chaos. Even after learning about BPD, it can take non-BPs weeks or months to really comprehend on an intellectual level how the BP is personally affected by this complex disorder since it affects people in different ways. It can take even longer to absorb the information on an emotional level.

2. The outer-directed stage: Non-borderlines turn their attention toward the person with the disorder, urging them to seek professional help, attempting to get them to change, and trying their best not to trigger acting out or acting in behavior. People at this stage usually learn all they can about BPD in an effort to understand and empathize with the person they care about. It can take non-BPs a long time to acknowledge feelings of anger and grief—especially when the BP is a parent or child. Anger is an extremely common reaction—even though most non-BPs understand on an intellectual level that BPD is not the borderline's fault. Yet because anger seems to be an inappropriate response to a situation that may be beyond the



borderline's control, non-BPs often suppress their anger and instead experience depression, hopelessness, and guilt. The chief tasks for non-BPs in this stage include acknowledging and dealing with their own emotions, letting BPs take responsibility for their own actions, and giving up the fantasy that the BP will behave as the non-BP would like them to.

3. The inner-directed stage: Eventually, non-BPs look inward and conduct an honest appraisal of themselves. It takes two people to have a relationship, and the goal for non-BPs in this stage is to better understand their role in making the relationship what it now is. For example, a non-BP with a borderline wife might discover that he has a pattern of choosing partners with borderline traits. Or a non-borderline might find that she expects her BP brother to recognize and respect her personal limits even though she has not clearly communicated these limits to him or observed those limits consistently herself. The objective here is not self-recrimination. It's insight and self-discovery. The good news is that although you cannot change the borderline, you can change yourself.
4. The decision-making stage: Armed with knowledge and insight, the non-BP struggles to make decisions about the relationship. This stage can take months or years. Non-BPs in this stage need to clearly understand their values, beliefs, expectations, and assumptions and how these come into play as they are making decisions. Often, these are such integral parts of us that we do not take the time to examine how they influence our everyday lives. For example, one man with a physically violent borderline wife came from a conservative family that strongly disapproved of divorce. His friends counseled him to separate from her, but he felt unable to do so because of his concern about how

his family would react. You may find that your beliefs and values have served you well throughout your life. Or you may find that you inherited them from your family of origin without determining whether or not they truly reflect who you are. Either way, it is important to be guided by your own values—not someone else's.

5. The resolution phase: In this final stage, non-BPs implement their decisions and live with them. Depending upon the type of relationship, some non-BPs may, over time, change their minds many times and try different alternatives. Eventually, most non-BPs we spoke with achieved a sense of serenity. They felt that they had done the best they could, usually with very little

information. Many non-BPs also said that the experience was valuable and taught them something about themselves they never would have learned otherwise.

BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE

It is easy to adopt the BP's black and white way of thinking and believe you only have two choices: stay or go. But many other options also exist. For example:

1. Leaving the situation temporarily whenever the BP violates your limits.
2. Taking a temporary break (days, weeks, or months) from the relationship.
3. Learning to depersonalize the BP's actions.
4. Remaining in the relationship but living apart.



5. Making the relationship less close.
6. Spending less time with the BP.
7. Achieving more of a balance in your life by cultivating your own interests, friends, and meaningful activities.
8. Telling the BP that you will remain in the relationship only if they are willing to see a therapist or make certain changes. (However, this will not be successful if you are making demands in an effort to control or threaten the BP. You must make it clear that you are simply notifying the BP that you will take these steps in order to take care of yourself.) Also, keep in mind that in order for therapy to work, the BP must be committed to a long-term process that can be quite arduous. If the BP is only seeing a therapist to placate you (or someone else), it is probably an unwise use of time and money.
9. Putting off making a decision until you feel comfortable making one.
10. Putting off making a decision until you see a therapist and work on some of your own issues.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

When making decisions about your relationship with a borderline, you might want to ask yourself some of the following questions.

- What do I want from this relationship? What do I need from this relationship? (These may be very different things.)
- How much of myself can I trust to this person? How open can I be with this person with my feelings? How important is this to me?
- Am I in physical danger by staying in this relationship? Have I ever had to leave the house to avoid being physically abused or to prevent myself from losing control and becoming physically abusive myself?
- How will this decision affect any children? What are my legal rights and responsibilities regarding any children? What is best for them?
- How does this relationship affect the relationship I have with myself? Am I OK with letting the BP's behaviors affect my moods and self-esteem?
- Have I accepted the fact that the BP will only change if and when they are ready to do so? How willing do they seem to be to modify their behavior? Am I able to wait until that happens—or live with things the way they are if it never happens?
- What are my options if the BP violates my limits? Are these long-term or short-term solutions?
- What may happen if I stay? What may happen if I go? What practical considerations (e.g., finances) do I need to consider?
- Do I believe that I have the right to be happy? Do I believe that I am only worth- while when I am sacrificing myself for others?
- When am I currently the happiest: when I am with this person, when I am alone, or when I am with others?

- Do I have the energy and fortitude to go against my family or other people who might be upset with my decision?
- Am I truly making my own decision, or am I doing what other people want me to do?
- What are the legal ramifications of my decision?
- Do I love myself as much as I love the borderline?
- Do I believe that accepting others' abuse is OK in certain situations? If so, which situations?
- If a friend was in my place and told me the story of this relationship, what advice would I give them?

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BPD RELATIONSHIPS

This pamphlet was prepared for *Facing the Facts* by Randi Kreger an author and freelance writer specializing in borderline personality disorder and one of over 20 Professional Members at *Facing the Facts*.

To purchase the *The ABCS of BPD*, please contact Ms. Kreger at www.bpdcentral.com

Kreger is the co-author of *Stop Walking on Eggshells*, and *The Stop Walking on Eggshells Workbook*.



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Kreger is also the co-author of two booklets about BPD, *Love and Loathing: Protecting Your Mental Health and Legal Rights When Your Partner has BPD* and *Hope for Parents: Helping Your Borderline Son or Daughter Without Sacrificing Your Family Or Yourself*, both published in 1999 by Kreger's Eggshells Press.