

Personality Disorders

This fact sheet will give some background information to what Personality Disorder is and how to go about finding help from national organisations.

What is Personality Disorder?

Everyone has a personality. A person with a personality disorder is one who has long-lasting inflexible patterns of thought and action, which develop from adolescence onwards, and which cause difficulty in personal, work or social situations. Some professionals see this as part of a continuum, where a person may have difficulties but manage their life unless there is a major stress; their behaviour then becomes more exaggerated and rigid, interfering with daily life.

Generally speaking, someone with a personality disorder has aspects of their nature which are more exaggerated than so-called normal, and which lead them to feel significant distress or have serious long term difficulties managing everyday life.

What are the different types?

There are many different types of personality disorder listed in psychiatric manuals, for example, Dependent Personality Disorder Paranoid Personality Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder. When the person's behaviour is maladaptive and inappropriate for their culture, and difficult for the person or their family and friends to contend with, medical or psychiatric help may be sought. For example, most of us experience levels of suspiciousness at some time in our lives, but when we see the world as so threatening that it changes the way we think and behave all the time, we are in need of help. Similarly, while dependency is a normal human need, if an adult is unable to undertake any tasks alone, cannot make decisions or lead an ordinary life because they need constant support, they are disabled and in need of clinical help.

The phrase 'Borderline Personality Disorder' can also be used, referring to the assessment that the individual is 'bordering' on a more severely unwell mental state.

What causes a Personality Disorder?

Research has shown personality disorders can arise from childhood events, such as abuse or serious neglect. It has also been found to correlate with those of other family members, leading to the hypothesis that the traits may be inherited.

Why is diagnosis so controversial?

There is still much stigma surrounding the diagnosis of mental health problems and personality disorders cause even more controversy due to misunderstanding by the public and negative press coverage. For example, some newspapers highlight the negative and sometimes present people diagnosed with personality disorders as dangerous to the community and as irrational or violent. This is NOT TRUE. It can be seen that the very label is stigmatising, implying that the whole person is somehow unacceptable.

The labelling of someone as having Personality Disorder is also controversial, partly because it has never been satisfactorily separated from Personality Type or Style, and partly because some mental health professionals have believed that someone with a personality disorder cannot be treated or helped.

Are personality disorders treatable?

The label Borderline Personality Disorder is controversial, as some mental health professionals have had doubts about whether someone with this label could be treated. However the key factor is whether a person is motivated to change and a number of approaches have been found to be useful, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, and intensive group and individual psychotherapy in residential therapeutic communities (some are listed below). Pharmacological treatments are also used. Frequently a mix of therapeutic approaches is found to be most helpful.

Useful organisations

The Consortium of Therapeutic Communities

Waterfront, Kingsdown Road, Walmes, Kent, CT14 7LL

Tel. 01242 620 077

Web: www.therapeuticcommunities.org

British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)

Imperial House, Hornby Street, Bury, Lancashire BL9 5BN

Tel. 0161 705 4304

Email: babcp@babcp.com

Web: www.babcp.com

Cassel Hospital

Therapeutic community for those with less severe personality disorders. Referral by a professional only

Cassel Hospital Personality Disorder Service, 1 Ham Common, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7JF

Tel. 020 8483 2900

Email: Cassel.ESPDeferrals@wmht.nhs.uk

Web: www.wmht.nhs.uk/cs/cassel-hospital-services

National Association for People Abused in Childhood - NAPAC

NAPAC, P O BOX 63632, London SW9 1BF

Infoline: 0808 801 0331 General enquiries: 0203 176 0560 from 9.00am-5.00pm

Email: info@napac.org.uk

Web: www.napac.org.uk

Support, advice and guidance for adult survivors of any form of childhood abuse - sexual, physical or emotional.

Emergence

A service user-led organisation with the overarching aim of supporting all people affected by personality disorder

367 Chiswick High Road, London, W4 4AG

Email: admin@emergenceplus.org.uk

Web: www.emergenceplus.org.uk

Websites

National Mind

http://www.mind.org.uk/help/diagnoses_and_conditions/personality_disorders

National Personality Disorder Website

www.personalitydisorders.co.uk

Royal College of Psychiatrists

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo.aspx>

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