

# Anchor Points Newsletter

Solid Rock Counseling Center - June 2007

## Walking on Eggshells

Originally, this particular edition of Anchor Points was going to be published right before Easter. It would have made so much sense if that had actually happened, but alas, it did not... As a Christian, Easter obviously has great spiritual significance - the resurrection is what our entire faith is based on. In our culture, Easter also leads to thoughts of cute bunny rabbits and brightly colored eggs. Which makes me think of eggshells, which naturally leads to thoughts of emotional problems. OK, so as a counselor, EVERYTHING leads me to thoughts of emotional problems, but hang with me - I have a point to this seemingly random string of thoughts!

**WALKING ON EGGHELLS.** Have you ever heard that phrase? Most of us have, and many of us know from experience what that means. It has nothing to do with colored eggs accidentally dropped and broken during the Easter egg hunt. It has everything to do with feeling like you're in a no-win situation with someone in your life. Feeling like no matter what you say or do, it will be the "wrong" thing in the eyes of that important person. "Walking on Eggshells" means to "walk" with great care, lightly, tip-toeing, taking care not to offend someone. The original phrase was "walking on EGGS", because, if you think about it, you have to be a lot more careful walking on EGGS than on eggshells...

Many people have loved ones or dear friends around whom they feel like they must "walk on eggshells". When they are around these folks, there is a feeling that it is necessary to maintain an abnormally high level of vigilance, or an unusually high level of caution. You can feel it in the pit of your stomach. When you are in a relationship with this type of person, it is very common to be in a nearly constant state of hyper-vigilance around that person. And that causes a

great deal of stress, among other things.

In this edition of Anchor Points, you'll learn more about what Walking on Eggshells means. You will learn about a condition called "Borderline Personality Disorder" (BPD) that many of these "eggshell" people have. As you read this newsletter, these descriptions may become uncomfortably familiar. What this newsletter DOESN'T go into is how to fix things if you find yourself in this type of situation—whether you are the one stepping on the eggshells or the one who causes the other person to feel as if they must tiptoe around you. The good news is that there IS hope and there are solutions. The challenging news is that working through these types of issues is too complicated to sum up in a 6-page newsletter! Page 6 lists books and websites where you can find more information if you're interested. And you can certainly come talk to me about any questions or concerns you might have.

BPD is a condition that causes a lot of unhappiness for a lot of people—both for the one who exhibits the symptoms and for those in their life. So many people have asked me about BPD in the past several months that I decided to go ahead and dedicate a full newsletter to the topic, and hopefully, some basic understanding can be gained.

Walking on Eggshells—that's no way to live your life. If you agree that this phrase describes the way you feel around a significant person in your life, please know that there is help available, and take the initiative to get that help.

Until next time! *Rebecca*



## What Does "Walking On Eggshells" Feel Like?

Ask yourself the following questions. "Yes" answers indicate that someone in your life is exhibiting behaviors that lead you to feel like you are "walking on eggshells".



- Do you find yourself hiding negative thoughts or feelings because it's easier than dealing with the other person's overreactions or because talking about problems simply makes them worse?
- After you try to explain yourself to the other person, does he/she use your own words and contort them to prove his/her own point (usually that you are "bad" or doing something wrong)? Does this person blame you for all the problems in his/her life (and your relationship) and refuse to acknowledge that his/her own actions cause problems for other people and for him/herself?
- Is his/her temper so unpredictable that you're constantly on your toes, adrenaline pumping, waiting for the next verbal attack? When you try to calm them down, does it only make them angrier? Is it difficult to enjoy the good times because you've been sucked in too often and you've learned to never let your guard down?
- Do you feel as if the other person sees you as either all good or all bad, with nothing in between? Is there sometimes no rational reason for the switch? When you come home from work each day, do you wonder who will greet you at the door: the person who basks in your love or the petty tyrant whose energy supply seems to come from intense, violent, and irrational rages? Does no one believe you when you explain that this is going on?
- Do you feel manipulated, controlled, or even lied to sometimes? Does this person attempt to get what they want by making you responsible for their feelings (e.g. "If you don't let me go the concert, I'll hate you for the rest of my life" OR "Only an ungrateful and selfish daughter would rather stay at school for Christmas break instead of coming home.")?
- Does this person seem to demand constant attention? Is everything always about him/her - say, even your personal medical decisions? For example, can this person manage being at a birthday party when the focus is on someone else? Or will they push through people's boundaries and ignore good manners by creating a scene that will bring the attention back to them?
- Are you afraid to ask for things in the relationship because you will be told that you're selfish and demanding? Does this person imply, explicitly declare, or show by example that your needs are not as important as hers/his are?
- Does this person continually contradict your needs and opinions so that he/she can be the voice of authority? Do you feel that his/her expectations of you are constantly changing so you can never do anything right?
- Are you accused of doing things you never did and saying things you never said? Do you feel misunderstood, and when you try to explain, do you find that the other person doesn't believe you?
- Do other people remark that this person is verbally and emotionally abusive or encourage you to leave the relationship? If and when you try to leave, does the other person attempt to prevent you from departing by trying to convince you that no one else loves you more or could put up with someone like you?
- Do you have a hard time planning social engagements, vacations, and other activities because the other person's moodiness, impulsiveness, and unpredictability may destroy your plans at the last minute? Do you make excuses for his/her behavior to convince others (and yourself) that this is okay?

If you answered "yes" to at least a few of these questions, the person in your life who causes you to feel like you are "walking on eggshells" may have a condition called Borderline Personality Disorder. To find out more about this condition, keep reading!

## What is Borderline Personality Disorder?

### DSM-IV criteria

The DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, version 4), gives these nine criteria; a diagnosis requires that the person exhibit at least five of these. In *I Hate You -- Don't Leave Me!* Jerold Kriesman and Hal Straus refer to BPD as "emotional hemophilia; [a borderline] lacks the clotting mechanism needed to moderate his spurts of feeling. Stimulate a passion, and the borderline emotionally bleeds to death."

#### Traits involving emotions:

Quite frequently people with BPD have a very hard time controlling their emotions. They may feel ruled by them. One researcher (Marsha Linehan) said, "People with BPD are like people with third degree burns over 90% of their bodies. Lacking emotional skin, they feel agony at the slightest touch or movement."

1. Shifts in mood lasting only a few hours.

2. Anger that is inappropriate, intense or uncontrollable.

#### Traits involving behavior:

3. Self-destructive acts, such as self-mutilation or suicidal threats and gestures that happen more than once

4. Two potentially self-damaging impulsive behaviors. These could include alcohol and other drug abuse, compulsive spending, gambling, eating disorders, shoplifting, reckless driving, compulsive sexual behavior.



#### Traits involving identity

5. Marked, persistent identity disturbance shown by uncertainty in at least two areas. These areas can include self-image, sexual orientation, career choice or other long-term goals, friendships, values. People with BPD may not feel like they know who they are, or what they think, or what their opinions are, or what religion they should be. Instead, they may try to be what they think other people want them to be. Someone with BPD said, "I have a hard time figuring out my personality. I tend to be whomever I'm with."

6. Chronic feelings of emptiness or boredom. Someone with BPD said, "I remember describing

the feeling of having a deep hole in my stomach. An emptiness that I didn't know how to fill. My therapist told me that was from almost a "lack of a life". The more things you get into your life, the more relationships you get involved in, all of that fills that hole. As a borderline, I had no life. There were times when I couldn't stay in the same room with other people. It almost felt like what I think a panic attack would feel like."

#### Traits involving relationships

7. Unstable, chaotic intense relationships characterized by "splitting" (see below).

8. Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment

- **Splitting:** the self and others are viewed as "all good" or "all bad." Someone with BPD said, "One day I would think my doctor was the best and I loved her, but if she challenged me in any way, I hated her. There was no middle ground. In my world, people were either the best or the worst. I couldn't understand the concept of middle ground."

- Alternating clinging and distancing behaviors (*I Hate You, Don't Leave Me*). Sometimes borderlines want to be close to someone. But when they get close it feels TOO close and there is a frantic effort to get some space. This happens often.

- Great difficulty trusting people and themselves. Early trust may have been shattered by people who were close to them.

- Sensitivity to criticism or rejection.

- Feeling of "needing" someone else to survive.

- Heavy need for affection and reassurance.

Some people with BPD may have an unusually high degree of interpersonal sensitivity, insight and empathy

9. Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms

This means feeling "out of it," or not being able to remember what you said or did. This mostly happens in times of severe stress.

#### Miscellaneous attributes of people with BPD:

- People with BPD are often bright, witty, funny, life of the party.

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It is our choices ... that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.

J.K Rowling

*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets 1999*

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- They may have problems with object constancy. When a person leaves (even temporarily), they may have a problem recreating or remembering feelings of love that were present between themselves and the other. Often, BPD patients want
- to keep something belonging to the loved one around during separations.
- They frequently have difficulty tolerating aloneness, even for short periods of time.
- Their lives may be a chaotic landscape of job losses, interrupted educational pursuits, broken engagements, hospitalizations.
- Many have a background of childhood physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or physical/emotional neglect.

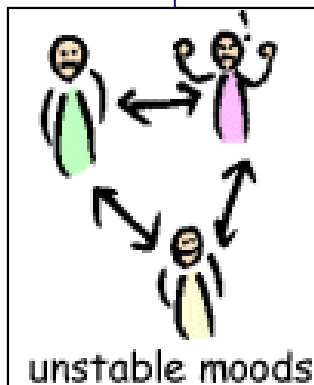
### More BPD Characteristics—

The main feature of borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a pervasive pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, self-image and emotions. People with borderline personality disorder are also usually very impulsive. The symptoms occur in most by early adulthood. The instable pattern of interacting with others has persisted for years and is usually closely related to the person's self-image and early social interactions. The pattern is present in a variety of settings (e.g., not just at work or home) and often is accompanied by a similar lability (fluctuating back and forth, sometimes in a quick manner) in a person's emotions and feelings. Relationships and the person's emotions may often be characterized as being shallow.

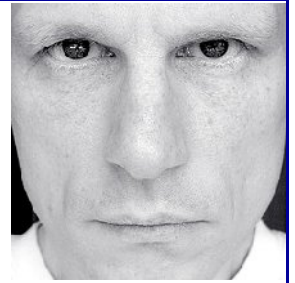
### Details about Borderline Personality Disorder Symptoms

#### Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.

The perception of impending separation or rejection, or the loss of external structure, can lead to profound changes in self-image, emotion, thinking and behavior. Someone with borderline personality disorder will be very sensitive to things happening around them in their environment.



They experience intense abandonment fears and inappropriate anger, even when faced with a realistic separation or when there are unavoidable changes in plans. For instance, becoming very angry with someone for being a few minutes late or having to cancel a lunch date. People with borderline personality disorder may believe that this abandonment implies that they are "bad." These abandonment fears are related to an intolerance of being alone and a need to have other people with them. Their frantic efforts to avoid abandonment may include impulsive actions such as self-mutilating or suicidal behaviors.



#### Unstable and intense relationships.

People with borderline personality disorder may idealize new acquaintances at the first or second meeting, demand to spend a lot of time together, and share the most intimate details early in a relationship. However, they may switch quickly from idealizing other people to devaluing them, feeling that the other person does not care enough, does not give enough, is not "there" enough. These individuals can empathize with and nurture other people, but only with the expectation that the other person will "be there" in return to meet their own needs on demand. These individuals are prone to sudden and dramatic shifts in their view of others, who may alternately be seen as beneficent supports or as cruelly punitive.

#### Identity disturbance.

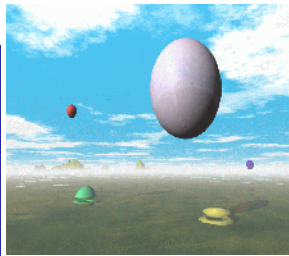
There are sudden and dramatic shifts in self-image, characterized by shifting goals, values and vocational aspirations. There may be sudden changes in opinions and plans about career, sexual identity, values and types of friends. These individuals may suddenly change from the role of a needy supplicant for help to a righteous avenger of past mistreatment. Although they usually have a self-image that is based on being bad or evil, individuals with borderline personality disorder may at times have feelings that they do not exist at all. Such experiences usually occur in situations in which the individual feels a lack of a meaningful relationship, nurturing and support. These individuals may show worse performance in unstructured work or school situations.

*For myself, I am an optimist—it does not seem to be much use being anything else.*

*Sir Winston Churchill*

People with BPD often "mask" well - meaning that they present an "I have it all together" face to the world, at work and to their therapists. People with BPD are often very charming, funny and engaging when they are not suicidal or raging. They work hard at covering their tracks; generally only those who are very close to them are aware of the emotional roller coaster going on inside. People with BPD frequently project *their* issues onto others. ("I don't have a problem - YOU have a problem.") As a result, people with BPD often live lives of misery, remaining undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. (and therefore improperly treated.) Borderline personality disorder is very *painful* for both the person with BP and the people in their life.

BPD seems to be highly triggered by entering a relationship, possibly because a greater feeling of safety allows them to let down their guard and drop the mask with their partners. (Note that I say "greater feeling of safety" - People with BP tend to be hyper-vigilant and NEVER feel safe, remaining on guard at all times.) Relationships bring intimacy issues and fears bubbling to the surface in all people; this seems to trigger the BPD symptoms and acting out. People with BPD are often highly abusive in relationships, yet do not see or fail to recognize / take responsibility for their behavior. The person with BPD sees their behavior as being normal and justified.



Borderline Personality Disorder is treatable with conventional therapy, geared toward impulse control, anger management and behavior modification, and also responds well to proper medication. (The misdiagnoses of BPD as Bipolar Disorder is very common - and generally leads to improper medication.)

Sadly - the overwhelming internal chaos, fear and shame often result in people with BPD refusing treatment. Treatment for BPD is a long term process, but can lead to a much better quality of life for the person with BPD and their partners and families. Unfortunately, it can be a challenge to find a therapist who will work with Borderline clients.

Those who are in relationships with those who have Borderline Personality Disorder need counseling and guidance just as much or more than the people with BPD. There is MUCH that can be done to help those who live with and love people who have BPD. Communication skills, stress reduction skills, learning to set and enforce boundaries—all are vital to maintaining your own health when you are in a relationship with a BPD. There really is a lot you can do to improve your situation.

### Gaslighting

*Gaslight* is a 1944 film in which Ingrid Bergman plays a Victorian newlywed who, through a devious series of manipulations (e.g., slowly dimming the gaslights) by her mentally ill husband, is slowly persuaded that *she* and not he is the unbalanced spouse.

Many folks with BPD traits are *extremely* invested in denying that they have a problem – the individual may believe that this is a natural and necessary way to think and be. Borderlines may wage a permanent war with all their loved ones as to "who is really the sick one here?"

Blatant denial of events or conversations that have occurred, endless circular conversations on who-did-what-when, and actually changing or removing physical evidence of dysfunctional behaviors are all gaslighting techniques.

### Why the name "Borderline"? (From <http://www.bpdworld.org/bpd.html>)

The name *Borderline* was coined by Adolph Stern in 1938. This name was used to describe patients who were on a 'borderline' between neurosis and psychosis. However, the symptoms of BPD are not so simplistic as to be defined in terms of neurotic and psychotic. The diagnosis of BPD is based upon signs of emotional instability, feelings of depression and emptiness, identity and behavioral issues rather than signs of neurosis and psychosis. However, the name Borderline has remained even though the definition has changed.

Throughout Europe, the same disorder has been given the more appropriate and less misleading title of '**Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder.**'

More recently, clinicians have begun using the term **Emotional Regulation Disorder (ERD)**, which more accurately describes this condition.

# ANCHOR POINTS NEWSLETTER

## SOLID ROCK COUNSELING CENTER

Rebecca Turner, L.P.C., Editor

1212 104th Ave SE ~ Bellevue, WA 98004

Phone: **425-454-3863**

Email: [rebeccahturner@msn.com](mailto:rebeccahturner@msn.com)

Website: [www.rebecca-turner.com](http://www.rebecca-turner.com)

### The Facts

- ◆ 6—10 million Americans, or 2% of the population, suffer from BPD.
- ◆ 75—90% of those diagnosed are female.
- ◆ Very little research has been conducted to investigate BPD in men.
- ◆ Cause of BPD is unclear but it appears to be a combination of genetic and environmental factors.
- ◆ Severe headaches and migraine appear to be more prevalent in patients with BPD than the general population.
- ◆ One in ten BPD sufferers successfully completes a suicide attempt.
- ◆ BPD patients generally respond poorly to treatment.
- ◆ People who have BPD are more likely to self-harm for two reasons: a) as a response to impulsive urges and b) as part of a suicidal gesture.
- ◆ At least 50% of BPD sufferers also suffer from depression.
- ◆ It is very difficult to say whether a person with BPD will change over time. Research has suggested that some people's symptoms improve, some get worse and some remain unchanged.
- ◆ Discontinuation of medications by BPD sufferers are high at 50%.
- ◆ Between 40% and 70% of BPD patients report having been sexually abused, often by a non-care giver.

### For More Information:

#### BOOKS:

- ◆ *Stop Walking on Eggshells: Taking Your Life Back When Someone You Know has Borderline Personality Disorder* by Randi Kreger and Paul Mason
- ◆ *Stop Walking on Eggshells Workbook*
- ◆ *I Hate You, Don't Leave Me: Understanding the Borderline Personality* by Jerold J. Kreisman and Hal Straus
- ◆ *Life at the Border: Understanding and Recovering from Borderline Personality Disorder* by Leland M. Heller, MD
- ◆ *Get Me Out of Here: My Recovery From Borderline Personality Disorder* by Rachel Reiland
- ◆ *Hope for Parents: Helping Your Borderline Son or Daughter Without Sacrificing Your Family or Yourself* by Kathy Winkler and Randi Kreiger
- ◆ *Breaking Free from Boomerang Love: Getting Unhooked from Borderline Personality Disorder Relationships* by Lynn Melville
- ◆ *Understanding the Borderline Mother* by Christine Ann Lawson
- ◆ *Surviving a Borderline Parent* by Kimberlee Roth, Freda B. Friedman, and Randi Kreiger

#### ONLINE:

- ◆ [www.bpdcentral.com](http://www.bpdcentral.com)
- ◆ [www.bpdresources.com](http://www.bpdresources.com)
- ◆ [www.bpdrecovery.com](http://www.bpdrecovery.com)
- ◆ [www.bpd411.org](http://www.bpd411.org)
- ◆ [www.borderlinepersonalitytoday.com](http://www.borderlinepersonalitytoday.com)
- ◆ [www.facing-the-facts.net](http://www.facing-the-facts.net)

