

CONTENTS

Books

- [SPLITTING: Protecting Yourself While Divorcing a Borderline or Narcissist](#)
- [Stop Walking on Eggshells](#)
- [Stop Walking on Eggshells Workbook](#)
- [Love and Loathing \(For Parents\)](#)
- [Hope for Parents](#)
- [Book by a truly recovered BP](#)
- [More Books](#)

CDs

- [A Non-BP's Guide to Custody](#)

Support Groups

- [Message Boards](#)
- [E-mail Groups](#)
- [Stories](#)
- [Regional Support Groups](#)

Resources

- [Abuse Patterns](#)
- [Basics of BPD](#)
- [Find a Therapist](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Media Kit](#)
- [Personality Disorder Awareness Network](#)
- [Hiring an Attorney](#)

Links

- [General Links](#)
- [Medical \(research and treatment\)](#)
- [Legal Help](#)
- [BP's and Non's](#)

Additional Traits Common to People with BPD

People with BPD may have other attributes that are not part of the DSM definition but that researchers believe are common to the disorder. Many of these may be related to sexual or physical abuse if the BP has experienced abuse earlier in life.

Pervasive Shame: The all-pervasive sense that I am flawed and defective as a human being. It is no longer an emotion that signals our limits; it is a state of being, a core identity. Toxic shame gives you a sense of worthlessness, the feeling of being isolated, empty, and alone in a complete sense. Non-BPs share this characteristic.

Undefined Boundaries

People with BPD have difficulty with personal limits-both their own and those of others. Non-BPs share this characteristic.

Control Issues

Borderlines may need to feel in control of other people because they feel so out of control with themselves. In addition, they may be trying to make their own world more predictable and manageable. People with BPD may unconsciously try to control others by putting them in no-win situations, creating chaos that no one else can figure out, or accusing others of trying to control them. Conversely, some people with BPD may cope with feeling out of control by giving up their own power; for example, they may choose a lifestyle where all choices are made for them, such as the military or a cult, or they may align themselves with abusive people who try to control them through fear. Non-BPs share this characteristic.

Lack of Object Constancy

When we're lonely, most of us can soothe ourselves by remembering the love that others have for us. This is very comforting even if these people are far away-sometimes, even if they're no longer living. This ability is known as object constancy. Some people with BPD, however, find it difficult to evoke an image of a loved one to soothe them when they feel upset or anxious. If that person is not physically present, they don't exist on an emotional level. The BP may call you frequently just to make sure you're still there and still care about them. (One non-BP told us that every time her boyfriend called her at work, he introduced himself using both his first and last name.)

Basics of BPD

[What is BPD?](#)

[Indicators](#)

[Additional traits](#)

[Types of BPD](#)

[Assumptions held by BPD sufferers](#)

[Myths and Realities](#)

[Common "games" between BPs and Non-BPs](#)

- [Related Sites](#)
- [National Resources](#)
- The Nook**
- [Message Board](#)
- [Library](#)
- [News](#)
- [Notice](#)
- [Disclaimer](#)

Interpersonal Sensitivity

Many individuals have noticed that some people with BPD have an amazing ability to read people and uncover their triggers and vulnerabilities. One clinician jokingly called people with BPD psychic.

Situational Competence

Some people with BPD are competent and in control in some situations. For example, many perform very well at work and are high achievers. Many are very intelligent, creative, and artistic. This can be very confusing for family members who don't understand why the person can act so assuredly in one situation and fall apart in another.

Narcissistic Demands

Some people with BPD frequently bring the focus of attention back to themselves. They may react to most things based solely on how it affects them.

[Home](#) | [FAQs](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Search](#)
[Books](#) | [CDs](#) | [Support Groups](#) | [Resources](#) | [Links](#)

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