



Emotional Wealth Secrets

Borderline Personality Disorder

The person suffering a Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is usually female. When you first meet her, you will be taken by her vibrancy and warmth, her generosity and caring. A person with BPD can be funny and witty and the life of the party. She will care about you, want sex with you and be happy to go along with whatever you suggest. You will love her deeply.

But over time, something happens that seems at first unfair and then later, decidedly strange. You will wonder if she is reading you correctly, or whether it's you that has got things wrong. She says it's you. Your disagreements become more frequent and you will be accused of saying things you didn't say and doing things you didn't do. Sometimes you are even accused of feeling feelings you don't feel. Unpredictably, she will change, and be upset or angry, for no apparent reason, yet equally as quickly she can "revert to normal". It becomes apparent to you that this is more than just "mood swings" yet usually she gives justified reasons for the changes. And it's always your fault.

If you are related to or involved in a relationship with a Borderline Personality (BP) you will often feel as though you are walking on eggshells. You will start to anticipate the mood swings, and wonder what mood she is going to be in today. You no longer feel "safe" as her reactions to things are so unpredictable.

The BPD is a disorder of the personality that borders on a psychosis (unreality). It does not present when the person feels safe and secure in a relationship, but starts to be displayed whenever the BPD interprets that they are not wanted. If you explain something you're not happy with, this will be heard as criticism. If you say you want some time on your own, this will be interpreted as rejection.

To the Borderline, where everything is black or white, the belief is, "if you are not with me, then you are against me". Friendships therefore, are either on or off. Deep friendships will be discarded in a heartbeat and a person from the past completely and abruptly cut off, if there is an interpretation of "not being on my side".

Here are some other tell-tale signs if you are in a relationship with a Borderline...

1. I feel like I'm walking on eggshells – no matter what I say or do, she twists it and uses it against me... this causes me to doubt my own sanity sometimes.
2. She blames me and criticizes me for everything that goes wrong, even when it makes no logical sense.
3. I feel like I'm on an emotional roller coaster. When I come home, will I be greeted at the door by the caring person I fell in love with? Or will it be the raging tyrant who's got to have it her way, no matter what?
4. She sees me as all good or all bad, with nothing in between. And when she feels one way about me, she can't remember ever feeling anything else. [This is called idealizing or devaluing. The Borderline cannot accept that you can be a good person and also have some faults sometimes. If you are good, then you are totally good, to be admired and adored. And if you are a little bit bad, then you are all bad, and deserved to be raged at. They become very easily disenchanted, then disappointed then enraged when you do not meet their expectations.]

5. I feel manipulated, controlled and even lied to.
6. I'm afraid to ask for things in the relationship. When I do, she tells me that I'm too demanding or that my needs are wrong or not important.
7. I find myself hiding what I think and feel because it's just not worth the scene that follows when I'm honest. It's become so automatic that I have a hard time figuring out what I'm really feeling.
8. I try to do what she wants me to do. But just when I think I've got it right, she changes the rules.
9. She's constantly putting me down – but as soon as I try to leave, she will be all loving again, tell me that she'll change, tell me that it's her fault, sorry she's hurt me (sometimes), and beg me to stay. The theme song of the BPD is "I hate you. Don't leave me".

The key characteristic of BPDs is that they verbally abuse others who are close to them, criticizing and blaming them to the point where it feels brutal. Yet they can switch and put on a charming front to others, in seconds.

The Borderline has a strong fear of abandonment, of being unloved and left alone. Their personality is driven by an intense terror of being abandoned and attempts to stop people abandoning them. They may 'pay them out' when anything is done which could be perceived as a sign of real or potential abandonment. Yet they do not seem to be able to grasp that their very behavior is what drives the loved one away.

Some steps for managing the relationship when someone you love has Borderline:

1. Don't take her actions personally. She has a disordered way of thinking and does not actually want to behave like this.
2. Be aware that she will need much more reassurance, praise and time from you, although this can become wearying. Convince her that your separateness does not mean that you don't care for her.
3. Empathize with her distress. Say for example, "I know you feel lost and down when I have to go away. That's understandable."
4. Remind yourself that this is only one aspect of who she is. Accept this as part of her whole person and focus on her other positive parts.
5. Take care of yourself and accept that you did not cause BPD, you cannot control it and you cannot cure it. Neither can you force the BP to seek treatment.
6. Examine yourself and the relationship. Take responsibility for your own behavior, but not anyone else's.
7. Try to identify triggers (sensitive areas) that lead to the Borderline's defense mechanisms. Then determine your own triggers.
8. When appropriate, shift responsibility for the BP's thoughts, feelings and actions back to the BP.
9. Don't retaliate with anger. Be assertive instead and use a broken record statement.

Adapted from Mason, P & Kreger, R 1998, *Stop Walking on Eggshells: Taking Your Life Back When Someone You Care About Has Borderline Personality Disorder*.

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