

Borderline Personality Disorder & Emotion Dysregulation

A non-stigmatizing overview of intense emotions, relationship sensitivity, and skills that can support stability.

What BPD can involve

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a diagnosable pattern that may include intense and rapidly shifting emotions, strong sensitivity to rejection or abandonment, unstable self-image, impulsive behavior, relationship difficulties, emptiness, anger, dissociation, or self-harm. People can experience some of these features without meeting criteria for BPD.

Why emotions may feel overwhelming

Biology, temperament, trauma, chronic invalidation, attachment experiences, and current stress can all influence emotion regulation. The goal is not to eliminate strong emotion, but to increase the ability to notice, tolerate, understand, and respond effectively.

Skills that can help

- Pause before acting on an urge. DBT skills such as STOP and TIPP can create time between emotion and action.
- Label the emotion and the prompting event separately.
- Check whether the intensity fits the facts of the current situation.
- Use interpersonal effectiveness skills to ask for needs while protecting relationships and self-respect.
- Track patterns such as sleep loss, substance use, hunger, conflict, or isolation that increase vulnerability.

Treatment can help

DBT has a strong evidence base for chronic emotion dysregulation and suicidal or self-harm behaviors. Other therapies may also be useful depending on symptoms, trauma history, and goals. Treatment should be individualized.

Try this reflection

What emotion tends to create the strongest urge to act quickly? What skill could help create a 10-minute pause?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.