

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER - PATIENT STORIES

Below are some stories which have been written by patients about their experiences of having BPD and the treatment and support they received from the Northants Personality Disorders Hub (formally known as Team 63). We hope you find them helpful and informative

Patient Story

Cam Mitchell

I was admitted to the Welland Centre in 2010 for what turned out to be a period of ten months. During this time I was diagnosed with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder and found my experience on the ward to be very difficult. The ward retained the safety of my earlier experience but I felt very misunderstood. The diagnosis attracted less sympathy and at times, I felt like I was subjected to stigma. My perceptions of myself and my identity also changed. I struggled to understand and articulate what I was feeling and expressed things through my behaviour which escalated and was challenging to others.

I began to meet with a clinical psychologist after I was discharged from the ward in 2011. This began a process of identifying and understanding my difficulties and developing solutions and alternative ways of responding to my emotions.

I started attending the Northants Personality Disorder Hub Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) programme in 2012. While DBT is often recommended before other kinds of psychological therapy; I found that having sessions with a clinical psychologist before starting at the Hub worked well for me.

I was also on probation at this point and found that the risk of breaching my probation terms increased my motivation to change and helped me to not act on urges. While I was initially sceptical about the treatment programme, I have found it to be a journey of discovery that had made me hopeful that I can pursue a different life. I was sceptical because I did not initially identify with “Marsha” and felt the material did not relate to men with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder, but I could also recognise similarities with other members of the group.

Having a male facilitator in the group helped put my mind at ease, but I sometimes felt I was being asked to work extra hard to make the content relevant to me (as a man). Perhaps I had taken other professionals encouragement literally but felt that the programme had been built up as a ‘cure’. I expected a ‘Eureka’ moment and for the things to change quickly and they did not.

I liken my experience of the DBT programme to lifting weights. If you go in immediately and try to lift the heaviest weight in the gym, you will fail. Being able to take more weight requires training, time and effort. It is hard work and difficult to do. I managed to keep an open mind and was encouraged to not see things in an “all or nothing” way. I began to notice small changes and benefits. I also started to notice times when I had used skills automatically or with little effort and laughed! Practice helped using the skills to become easier and more natural.

I realised that I will always have my “quirks” and will never be 100%, but my life really has changed. I think differently, I have more foresight, take in information differently, read situations I am in and I am less impulsive. I am more able to keep myself safe by putting up barriers to acting mindlessly and

without consequence. In difficult situations I now know that 'there is a way out'. I have also found it essential to create a disciplined routine for myself and take responsibility for my life and actions. My well-being is very good and I have not harmed myself, felt such despair, or been aggressive with others.

Guide to Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT)

Lewis Ramsay

Introduction

Dialectical behavioural therapy is the best form of treatment mental health wise I have received. In my time in services, I have been given different medication after medication and none of them really worked. I am not stating medication doesn't have its place for me, it was not the answer. Medication helped keep me safe but DBT helped me get my life back.

Give yourself credit

Starting DBT is a very brave move. Change is hard. Wanting to set goals and change your life takes courage. I know from personal experience sometimes it is easier to accept being unhappy. If you give DBT your all and want to make your life better it works. Like all good change it will not happen straight away.

It is hard to walk into a group of people you do not know. The thing to remember is everyone in the room has been at that point at some time. Everybody has nerves but it is worth pushing them aside for the bigger picture.

Things to remember:

- DBT is the start of getting your life where you want it.
- DBT can change your whole outlook on life.
- The goals you have set can be met if you want them.
- Support is always there if you need it.

If you have chosen to do DBT you are already on the right track. By accepting the need to change you acknowledge your life is not where you want it to be. The great thing is you are doing something about it.

You deserve the change to have a life worth living and need to hold onto this fact.

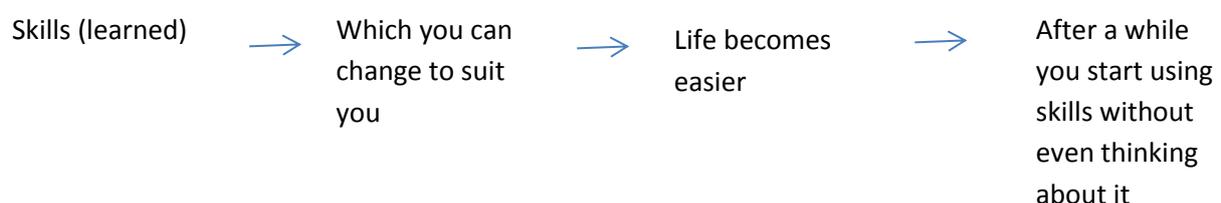
Myths of emotion:

The group and one to one sessions made me actually feel and accept my emotions. I always had this view that I can't let people in or allow myself to feel emotions. I now know it is ok to let people in. Emotions and showing them does not make anyone weak.

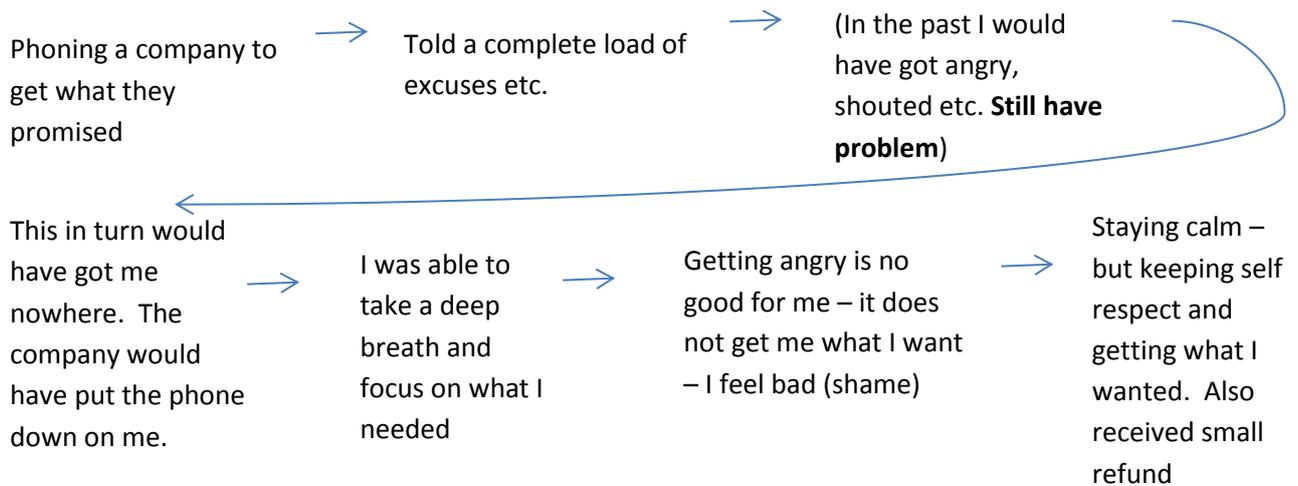
Another myth of emotions is letting people in means telling your life story. Always remember your past is yours. DBT helped me view my past as experiences.

D.B.T. (another view)

Another way to look at the skills you learn as a tool kit. We all know at times you need different size screws to do DIY for example. DBT teaches skills that help you get through life and is why it is like a tool kit.



Example of mine:



What DBT has done for me

I have accepted my past and put it where it belongs, in the past. My reactions to situations have changed. I no longer carry so much anger around with me, stupid judgements about myself have gone. I look at the longer view. Relationships are better because I can stick to my values but give reasons for my point of view. I have goals and they are now down to me to achieve. My life has become worth living but I know there is room to grow.

The most important thing DBT has taught me is that life is beautiful. I have had low points and high points. Going forward I have a skill set to cope when bad times appear in the future.

You can change your life. Things do get better. If I can do it, so can you.

Borderline Personality Disorder; My Spirited Journey

Lisa Bean West

Eighteen months ago I started treatment for Borderline Personality Disorder in the form of Dialectic Behavioural Therapy (DBT), under the care of Northants Personality Disorder Hub. It consists of weekly group therapy, as well as weekly 1:1 sessions with a DBT therapist. I didn't want to start group therapy at all; the thought of sitting in a room full of people all sharing experiences and talking about skills and everything else completely overwhelmed me. It was just so daunting knowing that for the next fifteen months, I was going to have to come here every Thursday and sit uncomfortably for two and a half hours, and at the time I had little faith that whatever they taught me would work.

I was adamant for a long time that I didn't want to form any kind of relationships with my fellow group members; I didn't want to care about them nor they care about me. I was closed off and shut down and it took me a long time to realise that actually, these people can help me. These people understand what it's like to suffer like I have. Once I had realised that, I opened up and I let them in. The single best thing I have done in my life.

It has been my experience that learning the DBT skills comes in waves, much like emotions. At first, the overwhelming feeling of fear and the unknown makes it difficult to take in any of what is said. Then, once you settle in, the motivation to learn kicks in and things seem to click. Things seem to improve somewhat. Then, there's a dip, a blip and things start unravelling again and you think 'Oh no! I'm back where I started. I'm even worse than I was BEFORE!' DON'T PANIC! This is the point where you are facing things head on, reprocessing your past experiences; you are feeling for the first time in a long time and it's scary. You will relapse. You will think 'What's the point'.....BUT...Don't. Give. Up.

I believed that this therapy would 'fix me', that I would suddenly transform into the person I always thought I would be, that I would miraculously erase my life and start again. My journey has taught me that I am not broken, that I AM the person I should have been all along, and that my experiences have made me resilient, compassionate, strong minded, loving, passionate and damn right determined. My personality is not disordered, my life is. I am the product of my environment and I am not inherently bad.

Another major misconception I had was that the skills would make me feel better. They won't. Sometimes they make you feel worse! But, it is not about eradicating feeling altogether; it is about learning that you can feel and survive and that the things you do feel do not last forever; we are not static.

Most of the skills in DBT make logical sense. There were times I would sit in group and listen to the facilitators and think 'This is just common sense!' and get annoyed because I believed they were trying to teach me things I already knew (because I am adamant that I know everything and am never wrong!!). Trying to implement these seemingly 'simple' things into your day to day life is a lot more difficult than I anticipated. Trying to access these skills amidst a crisis is sometimes impossible!

The one skill I continually struggle with is radical acceptance. Why would accepting things make any difference what so ever to my life now? I still don't really have the answers to this, but one thing I am trying to get my head around is that accepting something as it is DOES NOT MEAN that you agree

with it. In the words of Albus Dumbledore 'Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery'.

The module I have found most helpful is distress tolerance. It has taken a lot of effort to learn how to self soothe. The hardest part is choosing to soothe myself over self harm and punishment. However, my journey of discovering what self soothe means to me has been interesting and I'm still learning more about myself. I've learned that I respond well to most sensory stimuli, mostly smell and touch and it has helped me connect to the little girl inside me and try to find comfort in my environment. Self soothe has allowed me to regress; it's the one time I can be a child, and it's OK. I'm learning to care about me, and that feels very odd.

Fifteen months in the skills group was both the hardest and the best time in my life. It was there that I found the understanding and belonging that I have lacked all along; I found a family. I have made one particular friend from group; someone who I connect with and whom I love unconditionally; we are inseparable. Together we are continuing to make a life worth living...in our very own flat!

I think it will always be a constant battle to quiet my mind and the thoughts that condemn me. I'm OK with that. My time with my 1:1 therapist, Sue, has taught me oceans. I've learnt that I don't have to be perfect; that I am perfectly imperfect and that's just fine. I've come to realise that I have been through a hell of a lot and I need to give myself credit for just being alive; that I am a survivor, NOT a victim. I am eccentric and that's part of my charm; I'm not actually crazy at all! I am the queen of catastrophising, but I am getting better at noticing that and trying to rein my thoughts in. I am an artist, and with that comes (great responsibility ;)) creativity, emotion, an insane imagination, empathy and exuberance (which apparently is contagious). I deserve to be loved and I am loveable; I am NOT damaged goods. I still suck at being mindful, but like I said, I'm not perfect! I'm learning that I am not out of sight, out of mind, that I am always connected, by the moon and the stars, and that I am always held in mind; not forgotten. Most of all, I have learnt to trust. I think the thing I will hold on to most from my time with Sue is one particular text message 'Remember to soothe, don't hurt'. I have it tattooed on my hip, so that it will be a constant reminder of the path I should be choosing, a reminder to take care of myself, love and comfort myself, not destroy my soul. Thank You Sue. For everything.

When I compare myself now to how I was then, the changes are slight, but significant. My self harm has gone down dramatically, from every day to rarely, and although I still struggle on a daily basis with urges to self harm, I have control now, and most of the time, I make the right choice not to act.

I used to be completely isolated and shut off from the world because I was scared of it. I am still scared of it, but I'm in it. I'm trying to feel the fear and do it anyway!

The Hub have helped me change my life. I'm still a work in progress and I am realistic enough to expect the peaks and troughs of recovery, but you guys have helped me find my fight again. For the first time in my life, I know who I am, and who I am isn't all that bad. My DBT experience has been a roller-coaster and I have very mixed emotions about leaving. At the start, I didn't want to do it, but at the end, I would do it again in a heartbeat. It's not just the skills I have learnt, I have learnt more about myself and others than I thought possible. Most of all, I have learnt my own value; I am priceless.

Northants Personality Disorders Hub (Team 63)

By Cherie Cargill

My experience with the Northants Personality Disorders Hub has been one of the most VERY inspirational – life changing times. Before I was assessed to be part of the Hub, my life was disastrous – I'd been sectioned at least three times (which was really horrible), but at this point of life, anger and suicide were the only emotions I was able to feel, but at this time I was very impulsive.... which didn't help at all.

When I was accepted the Hub, I had a three month support of 1-1 with Sue to see what the main areas of my life needed improving. Sue was a very inspiring, empathetic, kind-hearted person, who I felt happy to share my issues with. Anger was the main issue I needed help changing in my life.

When I started the group, I was very anxious, but I found it helpful to be around others with similar lifestyle experiences as we understood each other well. I used to want to give up all the time as I didn't understand it at all, but I started asking lots of questions and this surely did improve my knowledge. Whenever I needed help outside of group, phone calls and 1-1 sessions were my key to the door.

When I did my midway assessment, my score had dropped, which showed my life was improving. I started working at a school as I'd learned so many skills by now – these were my coping mechanism.

***Interpersonal effectiveness** improved my way of bonding with others, so I held relationships much longer than I could before with friends, family, professionals too

***Emotional regulations skills** helped me recognise, accept and deal with all emotions in a stable way

***Mindfulness** helped me learn to bring my mind back to the moment whenever it wandered

By the end..... my score was sooo low, which means I don't have borderline personality disorder anymore – YEAH!

Due to all the skills I've learned..... I've become a **SPICE** girl, which means:

Social Skills

Physical Skills

Intellectual Skills

Communication Skills

Emotional Skills

These have all helped me believe in myself and also believe that **LIFE IS WORTH LIVING**. With a massive thanks to all of the support from all the inspirational staff from the Northants Personality Disorders Hub

THEY ARE THE BEST!!