Adult Personality Disorders
What are Personality Disorders?

Personality traits include how someone thinks, feels, behaves and relates to their environment. When someone's traits are rigid, rather than adaptive to new circumstances, and cause significant difficulty in work and social life, a personality disorder may develop.

The beginnings of these problems may be observed during adolescence. If they become enduring patterns, a Personality Disorder may be diagnosed during adulthood.

An individual diagnosed with a Personality Disorder may experience:
- Disturbances in self-image
- Difficulty enjoying mutual and meaningful relationships with others
- Difficulty in understanding themselves, others, and the environment
- Difficulty with impulse control
- Intense emotional reactions that may be disproportionate to the situation

There are different kinds of Personality Disorders, including, but not limited to, Paranoid Personality Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder and Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder. Personality issues should not be confused with differences due to one's culture and ethnicity.

Paranoid Personality Disorder
People diagnosed with Paranoid Personality Disorder typically show a pattern of mistrust and suspicion of others. They expect that others will exploit, harm or deceive them, even though there is little or no evidence to support these fears. They tend to be preoccupied with unjustified doubts regarding the trustworthiness of family, friends and acquaintances and have difficulty confiding in others, often finding hidden meanings that they experience as insulting or threatening. There are often recurrent suspicions about spouses or partners with little or no justification.

When they feel disrespected, they may respond with anger. Since these individuals have difficulty trusting others, they are often self-sufficient and have a strong sense of independence. In order to protect themselves, they may:
- Seek control in their relationships
- Be critical of others
- Experience difficulty accepting criticism of themselves

Antisocial Personality Disorder

Antisocial Personality Disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of violation and disregard for others' rights, which begins in childhood and continues into adulthood. Individuals diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder typically:

- Do not conform to social norms or, respect the law and often perform illegal acts against others
- Deceive and manipulate for their own benefit without considering other's rights, wishes or feelings
- Lack empathy and maybe indifferent towards having hurt or mistreated another, may blame the victim, and minimize the harmful consequences of their actions
- Have poor impulse control, engage in physical fighting and appear irritable and aggressive
- Tend to appear consistently irresponsible, as indicated by periods of unemployment, repeated absences with no explanations, or leaving numerous jobs without planning for the future

Borderline Personality Disorder

Borderline Personality Disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and impulsive behavior which begins by early adulthood. Individuals who experience this condition fear real or imagined abandonment and may make great efforts to prevent this abandonment. These individuals can experience ongoing feelings of emptiness and struggle with a fluctuating sense of self. They tend to engage in intense relationships which often flow between extreme idealization and devaluation of the partner.

Individuals diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder may engage in impulsive actions, which are potentially self-damaging, such as

- Self-harm
- Suicidal behaviors
- Irresponsible spending
- Binge eating
- Substance abuse
- Unsafe sex

Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder

Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder is characterized by a long-term pattern of preoccupation with orderliness and perfectionism at the expense of flexibility, openness and efficiency. This pattern of behavior often starts by early adulthood and appears across situations such as work, home, and school. Individuals who experience this condition may demonstrate:

- A preoccupation with details, rules, lists, order or schedules to the extent that the major point of the activity is lost

Source: http://www.mhawestchester.org/content/adult-personality-disorders

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- Perfectionism that gets in the way of task completion
- Inability to throw away worn-out or worthless items even when they have no sentimental value
- Inflexibility which may be experienced by others as rigidity and stubbornness
- An over-conscientiousness and inflexible attitude about morals, ethics or values
- An excessive devotion to work and productivity

What Causes Personality Disorders?

Research has not narrowed down an exact cause of Personality Disorders. However, findings do suggest some possible causes may come from a combination of:

- Biological factors
- Personality and social development
- Parental upbringing

These conditions may be exacerbated during times of increased stress, including the experience of significant loss in the individual's life.

A Personality Disorder should not be confused with cultural and religious customs, or with adjustment to a new culture following immigration. It is important to know if an individual's behaviors are typical of their culture. Personality disorders also should not be confused with behavioral manifestations of alcohol or drug use or a medical condition.

How Can Personality Disorders Be Treated?

Effective treatment results from a partnership between individuals who want to change their behaviors and their clinician. Effective approaches include Behavior Therapy, Cognitive Therapy, Cognitive-Behavior Therapy, any or all of which may be used in conjunction with medication.

Behavior Therapy/Behavior Modification
This treatment type targets an increase in positive productive behavior along with decrease in non-productive behaviors. This treatment type may involve informal supports, such as family and close friends, to support and strengthen the desired behaviors.

Cognitive Therapy

This treatment type assists individuals to identify non-adaptive thinking patterns that may lead to negative feelings and self-defeating behaviors. Cognitive therapy helps people incorporate positive and empowering thinking.

Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT)

This type of treatment combines cognitive and behavioral therapies to help people identify and change their non-adaptive thought patterns and beliefs and develop more productive and desired behaviors.

Like all of us, individuals who have been diagnosed with a type of Personality Disorder benefit from relationships with family, and close friends, as well as therapy or self-help groups. Support groups can help the individual who is working to change non-productive behaviors as well as the family and friends who support them.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

DBT is a specific form of cognitive behavioral therapy that blends traditional CBT with aspects of Eastern philosophies. The treatment was originally designed for individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, as well as others with suicidal and self-injurious behaviors. It has since been applied to a variety of conditions including depression and substance abuse. One of the main components of DBT is the teaching of positive life skills such as mindfulness, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness and distress tolerance. Overall, DBT helps people who tend to think and act in extremes, approach their lives in a more balanced way.

Additional Information about Personality Disorders

National Institute of Mental Health

http://www.nimh.nih.gov/

NIMH is an agency of the United States government. This site has clear information about mental health conditions and provides information on how individuals and family members can recognize symptoms and get the help they need.

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)

http://www.nami.org

NAMI is a grass roots family movement that was formed over 20 years ago. They strive to provide effective self-help and advocacy for people with mental illness.

http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=By_Illness&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=7671

This page provides brief information on the Borderline Personality and the treatment modalities that are often used.

Treatment and Research Advancements National Association for Personality Disorders (TARA APD)

http://www.tara4bpd.org/dyn/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=3

TARA APD is a not for profit organization that is dedicated to the education and research of personality disorders. This site promotes further education and research on the causes and most effective treatment modalities for these disorders.

http://www.tara4bpd.org/dyn/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=30

This page provides a brief but thorough description of all of the Personality Disorders and their symptoms. A comprehensive overview of the symptoms, research and treatment for Borderline Personality is also included on this site.