

Questions to Rachel Reiland

1: guilt, abuse, BP kids, recovery

I recently invited people to ask questions of recovered BP Rachel Reiland, the author of I'm Not Supposed to Be Here: My Recovery from BPD. I received these two questions and Rachel answered them as follows. Please keep in mind they are the opinions of one person, Rachel, and other people with BPD might answer the questions differently. If you have a question, send it to me at RandiBPD@aol.com and I will forward it to her. Rachel said she would answer questions twice a month.

Randi K.

Question 1:

"When my mother would verbally abuse me and tell me I was ugly, she wished I were dead, etc. was she even aware of what she was saying? And does she feel guilty when she is raging at me and abusing me?"

Rachel says:

"I really can't comment on what a parent would feel who was saying such things. Once upon a time, my therapist gave a wise description that helped me best understand BPD--that it was like stations on a radio. While BPD's are inherently turned up to the highest volume, there are significant differences in the kind of music they play. I was what they call an 'internal venter,' tending to vent my rage inward in self-destructive ways. [This is also 'acting in'] My therapy included bringing these feelings out so that my therapist caught most of my venom.

The one vestige of control I had left was my behavior towards my children. When I "lost it" with my son, I was so disgusted with myself it prompted me to consider suicide--and was the catalyst for me to seek help.

Guilt, though, I can tell you about, because I think it is something all BP's have in common. I personally always felt guilty--often warranted, often not. Guilt brings more self-directed rage. For me, that meant becoming increasingly self-destructive. For someone with a tendency to vent outwardly, it most likely would spur them to become even more vicious in their behavior or verbal abuse.

In a nutshell, at least for me, everything emanated from self-hatred--from guilt both justified and imagined. That rage fueled behavior. Whatever the venting--in or out--the more out of control I was, the more I felt guilty, the more out of control I became. It was a self-perpetuating cycle.

In my book "I'm Not Supposed to Be Here" there are some excellent examples of

out-of-control-behavior and how Dr. Padgett reacted to calm them, rather than exasperate them. Kriesman's SET principles--involving empathy, but firm limits--were very effective.

In my own case, my therapy distinguished between what were irrational guilts leading to self-hatred, and what were rational guilts and regrets. Once I straightened out the self-hatred--an arduous process, believe me!--there was no fuel, and hence no need, for the rage, either internal or external.

Rachel Reiland

Question 2:

"Looking back, when did the first signs of BPD appear in you? With my 15 year

old daughter it seems to have begun at puberty. She too acts both outward and inward. We had a hard time finding help for her at first but she was persistent with her BD ways and attempted suicide with pills. Since October 2001 she has been getting treatment at a residential treatment center. She is a bright and beautiful child, and in my heart I know she will learn ways to cope with this illness as you have."

Rachel says:

"Hmm... Another good question. Of course, I didn't know what BP was--or really much about mental illness, for that matter--until I was 30 years old and well into therapy. I did, however, know there was something "different" about me at a very, very early age. It pretty much began by the time I was in school, and had other children as points of reference of what was "normal" to which I could compare myself.

Could my parents have picked this off at that age? I doubt it. Most of the rage, turmoil and self-hatred at that time was pretty much inside my own mind. I was a real dichotomy in those days. On the one hand, I was a real class clown and quite disruptive. On the other hand, I was an exceptional student.

Back then, it was quite perplexing to the teachers--this seemingly random "flip" between the behavior--disabled and the gifted. When I look back on it, though, the pattern was quite consistent and predictable. Those teachers who took the little bit of extra time to challenge me, to call my bluff, to ask "why, to seem if they cared about the answer--for them, I would do virtually anything, I would excel and flourish. For those who either ignored me or crassly dismissed me--read: rejection!--I could be a complete nightmare in the classroom.

Like most kids, most of the visible stuff didn't take place where they could see it, but away from home. I guess the first visible sign they could see

was the anorexia--hard to miss that...

Now, a few examples I've seen of kids in my experience as a parent who is very active working with youth... Near the end of my therapy, where I was becoming healed and whole enough to start looking beyond myself to see the damage my whole journey had inflicted on my children. My daughter, who was in first grade about then, was seemingly shy and sweet on the surface, but there was a real groundswell of rage beneath that--which would come out on occasion when really pushed.

Would I have noticed that had I not been more acutely aware than most people, having experienced what I had? Probably not... But I did. And we spent lots of time talking and working it through. I had a great blueprint--the many therapy sessions with Dr. Padgett, the wise things he said, the distorted perceptions I knew I had that I detected in her. I opted to become a writer and stay-at-home mom to spend lots of time with my kids while they were still young enough to reach. And I honestly, honestly, think it worked.

Do I see kids now who manifest such traits? All the time. I coach, I work with youth, I substitute teach--I keep a special eye out for such kids. I know what makes them tick, I know how they can be reached--because I was one.

And I have a very special place in my heart for them. They tend to be very bright kids, capable of a lot, who can be infuriatingly disruptive, angry or hostile at times, then astonishingly productive at others. One of the joys, to me, of coaching, is to reach inside such kids and bring out the best in them--in a way they don't even understand it's happening.

I remember one girl in particular whom a series of coaches had written off as uncoachable. The kid was smart and had exceptional natural athleticism and ability. At season's end, other coaches who'd had her before were amazed how

I'd been able to control her, tap her abilities, and get her to be a team player. If only they knew. Obviously, I never got into deep heart-to-heart discussions with her about her innermost thoughts. Nor can I say there weren't times I was totally exasperated by her behavior. But there was this unspoken bond between us--this empathy that I had and she sensed. It calmed her down enough to play by the rules; to be a team player.

The preface to my book quite correctly notes that there is no one-size-fits-all definition of BP, nor is there a one-size-fits-all cure. My recovery was a unique product of many things: my particular manifestation of the illness, my own determination to endure the process, my ability to understand the process, the exceptional compassion and talent of my therapist and the chemistry the two of us had working together.

What I do think can benefit anyone, however, is to read the story paying close attention to how Dr. Padgett reacted to various situations, the things

he said, and the topics he addressed. I know this because once I was sufficiently recovered, I used the same techniques, the same analogies, the same empathy on my kids as were used on me. And they worked. With both of the older ones now teenagers, we really have strong lines of communication. They are good, strong, emotionally healthy and--most importantly--happy kids. They just have the extra dose of character and wisdom that comes with enduring a tough experience.

"I'm Not Supposed to Be Here" isn't a cookie-cutter, how-to book. It isn't a recipe for therapy. It does, however, show a real life example of how out-of-control behaviors can be diffused, how the seemingly unreachable can be reached.

Most of all, it shows that there is hope. As long as we are alive, there is always hope, always a second chance...

I wish you luck with your daughter. The fact that you are in tune with her problems while she's still young and in your home is a major head start!

Rachel Reiland