

Q. Has the emotional lability (moodswings) dissipated and how much?

Rachel:

Kyle brings up a very good question--one that I had myself, when I was going through the process. I am, inherently, a passionate, emotional person. There are, of course, negatives and positives to that. In reading what so many of you have posted about dealing with the BP's in your life, genuine emotional passion, while infuriating and sometimes downright devastating, is also one of the main aspects of a BP that often attracts someone to him or her in the first place--I know that was the case for my own husband.

As much as I wanted to numb the emotional roller coaster inside me, one of my greatest fears in therapy was--if I succeeded in calming my emotions, would I become a totally different person? As is described in the Axis-DSM criteria, I feared nothingness. While I desperately wanted to calm the raging inferno inside me, I didn't want to then turn into someone emotionally castrated, totally void of passion.

My fears, as it turns out, were unfounded. Therapy didn't change the fundamental nature of the person I am, the "core," so to speak. I am an inherently a passionate, emotional person. That has not changed.

What has changed are two key things. First, by changing my perception of reality--casting aside the distortions, black and white thinking, the skewed vision I'd had from a very young age--my view of reality became much more rational, with far fewer episodes of irrational rages or emotional reactions.

Of course, even the emotionally healthiest person in the world is prone, from time to time, to overreact or irrationally react to something. This is why the second change became so important--I learned to "ride" my intense feelings and emotions, to simply experience them, rather than to automatically react to them.

Dr. Padgett compared emotions to waves in the ocean. If you constantly fight them, struggle against them, try to swim away from them, you are destined to become exhausted, to be pulled under, and to drown. If, however, you simply acknowledge that waves are, at times, going to exist, and ride them, not fight them, eventually they subside. One of my own problems was not so much the fact that I was subject to intense emotions, but that I feared them and fought them, acted out against them--which is where the real damage lies.

Like anyone else--particularly anyone else of a passionate nature--I still have waves of feeling. Sometimes they can be very intense. But I know what to do. I ride them, I sit them out, and I vow not to act in reaction to them. I take deep breaths. I try to place the feelings in perspective--are they rational, irrational? I pray. Most importantly, though, I make a concerted effort not to act, at least not in an irrational, knee-jerk fashion. It works for me.

As in the Serenity Prayer, I have come to realize that there were and are things about me that can be changed, and that there are things I cannot. I am always praying for courage, acceptance and the wisdom to know the difference.

Q. My 19 years old daughter has been diagnosed as BPD after many years. Here in Chile we have no found a therapist with a real experience in BPD, but we found one who said he wanted to work with her, make a commitment and try to heal her. He works with dialectical and cognitive therapies. Do you think my daughter would heal in the future? My husband, my family and me are worried about her and looking for anything to support and trying her to get better. But do you think she is so young in order to work hard and be mature enough? Can I make something to help her to understand all this or it's just a matter of time that she commits herself to heal?

Rachel:

I wish I had an answer to Angelica's question, I really do. I wish I could tell her that her daughter can definitely heal with the help of the therapist she's found. I wish I could say with certainty that everything will work out in the end.

Unfortunately, I can't answer with such certainty. What I can say, though, is that it is certainly possible. I know it can happen, because it happened to me. It happens to other people. And yes, it can happen for her daughter.

As for the kind of therapy, I'm not really all that conversant in the details of the different kinds of therapies out there to treat BPD. Mine, I know, was psychoanalytic in nature--a slightly adapted version of the classic analysis introduced by Freud over a century ago. The more I've read, though, the more I can see it also had aspects of behavioral and cognitive therapy as well. It was effective for me. It was also expensive for me--but it was worth it. I was fortunate to have a therapist willing to take a deep cut in his rate as part of his commitment to treating me.

Sounds as if you've found a therapist who is committed to working with your daughter. If you get a chance to read, "I'm Not Supposed to Be Here", you'll get a glimpse into why it takes such commitment from the therapist, the kind of venom I hurled his way en route to treatment. I'm no expert on BP, but I can understand why it is so many therapists are reluctant to treat it. If you've found one who is, that's a good start!

As for her age of 19, I'd think that's plenty old enough to be able to deal with the issues, to think abstractly, to be able to participate in the process.

As far as any timeline to healing, any idea of how long the process will take; I don't know there's anything you can tell her. What I can say in my case is that, once the process began, it was like being in the midst of childbirth. It drove itself, and it drove itself best when I was open to it and didn't try to resist it.

It was the most challenging, frightening, most hellish thing I've ever faced. And it was, in the scheme of things, absolutely and unequivocally worth it.

When I myself was amidst the process, I found myself wanting to at least have some idea of what to expect. I wanted something more than clinical; I wanted a glimpse of reality. I wanted a story if hope. I spent hours upon hours in the library looking for such a book, and simply couldn't find one. So I wrote one. It's my hope that it can help others understand what healing entails and, more importantly, that it is very possible.

Q. I strongly suspect my sister has BPD. She's disowned me (again) for no reason that I can discern and I'm ok with that because my life is much calmer and healthier without her in it. However, I'm worried about my nephew. Is there anything that my parents or I could do to encourage HER to take ownership of her own life and get help for herself? I really want my nephew's life to be bearable! I know everyone is different, but are there any general rules of thumb for us to work with?

Rachel:

Unfortunately, I can't give a very good answer to Ghita's question because, as she wisely points out, we are all very different.

Change is a great thing--it is a transforming thing. We all have the power and grace to change our hearts, every single one of us. There are few greater miracles than a change of heart. There are also, however, few things more frightening to many people, than change. The fear of the unknown is one of the biggest reasons people will stay in relationships they know are totally

wrong for them, will stay in jobs they hate, will continue self-destructive habits they know will eventually destroy them, will even take their own lives. Because, in the scheme of things, the unknown is even more frightening, even worse.

I can tell you, from going through it, that change is just as scary as it's cracked up to be...and just as transforming.

At the risk of sounding cliché, no one can force a change of heart on someone else. The best they can do is to confront them, to try to open their mind and heart to the possibility. But even God can't force a change of heart on someone who isn't open to the prospect.

The good news is that, sometimes, miracles do happen. I sincerely hope that turns out to be the case for your sister--and your nephew.

Rachel Reiland
"I'm Not Supposed To Be Here"