



Essential Information

What treatment is available to me?

The most effective treatment for personality disorders involves meeting with a trained mental health clinician to talk about your problems. These discussions are called counselling or psychotherapy and they usually focus on helping you improve your relationships, thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Psychotherapy provides a great opportunity to set goals and make changes in your life.

What does treatment look like?

Research shows that psychological therapy is the best treatment for personality disorders.

Individual

Individual therapy involves seeing a clinician on your own for an agreed amount of time (e.g., 50 minutes, once a week). Effective therapy can vary but involves some structure, meaning you need to actively participate. It is important that you and your clinician discuss and agree on this at the beginning of therapy, including how often you will see each other and how long the therapy will last. During therapy, your clinician may help you identify problems, develop goals, and ask you to try some strategies or exercises outside the session. It can take some time to feel like things are changing and getting better, perhaps weeks or months; therefore, it is important to persist.

Groups

Group therapy involves attending sessions with other people who may be experiencing similar problems to you. Groups usually consist of two clinicians, or a clinician and a peer worker, and up to 10 group members who all work together to support one another. Groups often help people feel connected to others who are having similar experiences and provide a space to share, learn new skills and help you deal with problems more effectively. You may feel anxious about starting in a group – many people feel this way. Talk to the group clinician or peer worker, it may help to ease some of your concerns.

Support for others

It can be helpful for people close to you to speak to a mental health clinician to learn more about personality disorder and treatment. Family and carer groups can also be helpful.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that what you discuss in therapy remains private between yourself, your clinician, and others attending if it is a group setting. However, sometimes the clinician may need to share information with others in order to keep you or someone else safe. The clinician will explain this at the start of therapy, so it is important that you understand what this means and how it may affect you.

What about hospital treatment?

Sometimes a short hospital stay can be helpful if things are getting really tough and you don't feel safe. A short stay can help you manage a crisis or difficult time so you can get back on track but it is unlikely to treat the disorder. It is best if hospital stays are planned and talked through with your doctor or clinician. An important part of a hospital stay is to make a plan about how you will look after yourself once you are back in your community, including what treatment and support options may be available to you. Mental health clinicians at the hospital can help you do this.

What about medication?

Medications do not treat personality disorder, as they are not likely to help with relationship difficulties or understanding your feelings. However, medication may help with other problems you are experiencing at the same time, such as depression or anxiety. If your doctor suggests taking medication, ask for information about it including the benefits and any possible side effects. If you don't understand some of the information, ask for more details. As with any medication, it is always best to take it as prescribed, and avoid suddenly stopping or changing dose without talking to your doctor first.