

## Beating BDD Episode 4 – Gareth Stephens

For this episode I spoke to Gareth Stephens. In just eight years Gareth has gone from being too ill with BDD to work to helping others recover from anxiety disorders as a CBT therapist in south London. His interview shows that however bad things seem, it is possible to make a full recovery from the disorder.

*‘In the last five or six years I’ve probably had two dysmorphic thoughts. On both occasions I looked in the mirror, then thought, “No, I don’t do this anymore.” And I was able to walk away and get on with my day.’*

### When did his BDD appear and how did it manifest itself?

[00:04:50] He has distinct memories of instances that made him very aware of his appearance from aged 8.

[00:05:43] The anxiety became a real problem at about 15-17 years and got progressively worse. Leaving university after three months was a defining moment.

[00:14:35] His appearance concerns related to aspects of his face and body.

### How did his BDD affect his life?

[00:01:20] A typical day involved spending lots of time scrutinising pictures and videos and feeling progressively worse.

[00:09:08] After dropping out of university, he had 8-9 years of being very affected. He was too anxious to hold down jobs and started having panic attacks.

[00:13:08] He became very socially isolated.

### How did he find out he had BDD and why did it take so long?

[00:07:20] Gareth didn’t know what the problem was – just knew he was experiencing unpleasant feelings and situations.

[00:09:18] At about 24 he saw his GP about the panic attacks. This led to 4-5 years of unsuccessful treatment from psychologists who didn’t understand BDD.

[00:11:45] It was after seeing the programme Too Ugly for Love that he made an appointment to see David Veale and got a diagnosis.

### What specialist treatment did he have?

[00:15:44] He undertook 12 weeks of in-patient treatment.

[00:16:37] The therapy involved stopping maintaining behaviours and changing his relationship with his thoughts.

[00:17:43] Doing the things that made him uncomfortable was also key.

[00:19:02] There were two Eureka moments after about three and six weeks of treatment.

### What else helped him to get better?

[00:13:35] Gareth met a girl through an online support group who helped him to see that things could be different.

[00:22:57] Supportive relationships have helped. He’s also done courses and set up/attended groups relating to other anxiety disorders, as well as used techniques like diaphragmatic breathing.

### What’s life like for Gareth now?

[00:00:47] He’s a CBT therapist seeing patients and overseeing trainees.

[00:26:12] He doesn't have dysmorphic thoughts anymore – in fact, he even has positive ones!

What advice would he give to people suffering with BDD?

[00:29:41] It's important to open a door in your mind to the possibility that the way you see yourself may not be the reality.

[00:30:16] Have some faith in your therapist and the therapy and push yourself as hard as you can.

### **Resources**

- The BDD Foundation: [bddfoundation.org](http://bddfoundation.org)