

# BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

## A Guide For Parents



## WHAT IS BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER (BDD)?

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is a psychological condition where a person becomes very preoccupied with one or more features in physical appearance, e.g. nose, skin, hair, etc. The concern can be very specific (e.g. "my nose is too big") or it may be vague (e.g. "I feel ugly").

People with BDD engage in behaviours to 'fix' or hide the perceived flaw/s that are difficult to resist or control (e.g. frequently checking mirrors, seeking reassurance, etc).

BDD can seriously affect a person's daily life, including school, social life and relationships. As a result, social isolation, social anxiety and depression are very common in BDD.

## Common signs of BDD

- Obsessive worries about one or more features
- Checking mirrors/reflective surfaces a lot or avoiding them altogether
- Going to a lot of effort to conceal perceived flaw/s (e.g. with make-up, clothes, postures or other means)
- Avoiding pictures
- Constantly comparing one's appearance to others
- Frequently seeking reassurance about appearance
- Avoiding social situations
- Excessive skin picking
- ...

## Impact of BDD

People with BDD worry a lot more than others about their appearance. They may spend several hours per day *worrying* about how they look and trying to fix or hide their appearance.

It is very common for young people with BDD to feel anxious, upset, depressed because of their appearance concerns and experience life as being a struggle.

# WHAT CAUSES BDD?

No one knows exactly what causes BDD, but research suggests it is a combination of different (risk) factors, such as:

- Genetics
- Chemical imbalances in the brain
- Exposure to frightening or upsetting experiences (e.g. bullying, abuse, life stresses). Bullying can have
- Perfectionism

Whatever it is that causes BDD, we know that it is not your child's fault or anybody else's fault and that there are effective treatments available to help overcome BDD.

**Your child is not alone!**

BDD often begins in adolescence, but it can start earlier in childhood. BDD affects up to 2% of teens; this means that, in a school with 2,000 kids, around about 40 will suffer from BDD.

**Remember, your child is not alone!**

# HOW DO YOU GET HELP FOR BDD?

It is difficult to manage BDD alone. Having supportive people on your child's side will make it easier for them to get the right help.

There are lots of ways your child can get help:

- Make a GP appointment (take this information leaflet to the appointment)
- If your GP agrees your child may be struggling with BDD or appearance anxiety then they will refer them to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

The good news is that there are effective treatments for BDD! The national guidelines for BDD recommend two treatment options, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) for BDD and/or medication.

# DOES MY CHILD HAVE BDD?

## BDD Screening Questions

1. Does your child spend an hour or more everyday worrying about their appearance?
2. Do they find themselves carrying out lots of behaviours to cope with their appearance worries (e.g. mirror checking, grooming routines, comparing their appearance with others, etc)?
3. Does their appearance worries upset them a lot and/or get in the way of daily activities (e.g. socialising, going to school, leisure activities etc)?
4. Are their appearance concerns **exclusively** focused on being too fat or weighting too much?

If you answered "yes" to questions 1) to 3) and "no" to question 4), it is possible your child may be experiencing BDD.

**Caution! Please note that the above questions are intended to screen for BDD, NOT diagnose it; the answers indicated above can suggest that BDD is present but can't give a definite diagnosis.**

*BDD is an anxiety condition, like anorexia, but my daughter, the anxiety is focussed on her perception that she is ugly. We ask others not to comment on her looks, just be loving and kind.*



# BDD AND SCHOOL

BDD often interferes in school-life. For example, it can affect:

- School attendance (e.g. being late to school or missing school altogether)
- Concentration and learning
- Participation in lessons (e.g. missing certain lessons like P.E. or leaving the classroom to check mirrors or to fix/hide perceived appearance flaw/s)
- Relationships (e.g. avoiding contact with peers, making or maintaining friendships)

## HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?

- Educate yourself, your child, and school on BDD.
- Be patient, BDD is an illness, not something he/she can easily control.
- Avoid getting into conversations about the perceived flaw/s as this can cause tension and conflict.
- Help your child seek an assessment and evidence-based treatment for BDD.
- If your child has been diagnosed with BDD, we recommend you share this with your child's school so they can understand their struggles and support them in school.
- Liaise with school to consider what reasonable adjustments can be made to support your child.
- If in treatment, seek guidance from the therapist on how to support your child in their recovery.
- We always encourage school, family and therapist to work together so that you can be best supported towards your child's goals.

Please see *For More Information and Advice* and *BDD guide for School Personnel*

## IN SUMMARY....

- BDD is a common anxiety problem where the person becomes very preoccupied with one or more features in their appearance
- Your child is not on alone: BDD affects up to 2 young people in every 100
- We don't really know what causes BDD and it will be a combination of different factors, but we do know how to treat it!
- There are people who know about BDD and can help your child. BDD can be very distressing and make your child feel very upset but if they seek the appropriate help, it is a treatable problem!

# BDD MYTH BUSTERS

## It's NOT about vanity!

People with BDD often describe feeling fundamentally inadequate, unacceptable, unlovable because of how they look.

It is important to remember that BDD is a mental health condition, and in fact a very serious one.

## It is NOT an eating disorder!

BDD and Eating Disorders (ED) are two *different* mental health conditions.

In ED, the concern is exclusively about a fear of gaining weight, resulting in unhealthy behaviours to limit/control weight.

Although someone with BDD may restrict their food intake, the main preoccupation is not exclusively about weight.

## It CAN affect any gender!

BDD can affect any gender and in similar ways

## It's NOT caused by social media!

The idea that BDD can be 'caused' by social media is a popular myth.

Social media can affect self image, but remember, BDD is an illness and we're not totally sure of its causes.

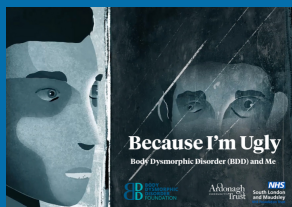
There is no evidence so far that social media 'causes' BDD.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ADVICE

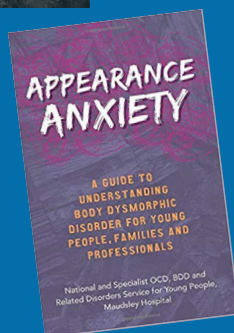
- [www.bddfoundation.org](http://www.bddfoundation.org)
- [www.ocdaction.org.uk](http://www.ocdaction.org.uk)
- National and Specialist OCD, BDD & Related Disorders Service  
Email: [ocdbdd.camhs@slam.nhs.uk](mailto:ocdbdd.camhs@slam.nhs.uk)  
Phone: 020 3228 5222

## USEFUL RESOURCES

INSERT Animation LINK HERE



*Appearance Anxiety: A Guide to Understanding Body Dysmorphic Disorder for Young People, Families and Professionals*  
(Jessica Kingsley Publishers)



Check out our guide on BDD for young people and school personnel



## QUOTES FROM PARENTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH BDD

*BDD got in the way of my child's education as he could not make it into school. He wanted nothing more than to go to school and to do normal teenage things, but was unable to do so on account of his BDD. My advice would be not to blame yourself for any of this.*

*To others parents I would say have hope. Remember that BDD is a symptoms of your child's anxiety. They can get better.*