

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

A Guide For Young People



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 anxiety, isolation and depression are very common in BDD.

Common signs of BDD

- Obsessive concern about one or more features
- Looking in mirrors/reflective surfaces a lot or avoiding them altogether
- Avoiding pictures
- Going to a lot of effort to conceal perceived flaw/s (e.g. with make-up, clothes, postures or other means)
- 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 or suicidal 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)
- Perfectionism

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

You are not alone!

BDD often begins in adolescence, but it can start earlier in childhood.

BDD affects up to 2% of teens; this means that, if in your school there are approximately 2,000 kids, around about 40 will suffer from BDD.

Remember, you are not alone!

HOW DO YOU GET HELP FOR BDD?

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

There are lots of ways you can get help:

- Tell someone you trust
- Make a GP appointment (take this information leaflet with you to your appointment)
- If your GP agrees you may be struggling with BDD or appearance anxiety then they will refer you 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.

DO I HAVE BDD?

BDD Screening Questions

1. Do you spend an hour or more everyday worrying about your appearance?
2. Do you find yourself carrying out lots of behaviours to cope with your appearance worries (e.g. mirror checking, grooming routines, comparing your appearance with others, etc)?
3. Do your appearance worries upset you a lot and/or get in the way of daily activities (e.g. socialising, going to school, leisure activities etc)?
4. Are your 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 you 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.

"I have to do my hair every morning until it looks right... This means washing, straightening, styling, and then starting again if it doesn't turn out. Usually I don't get into school before lunch time."

"I was spending an average of 4-5 hours getting ready to leave the house, with all my energy going into plastering on foundation and concealer and re-constructing my face as much as I could"



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 certain lessons (e.g. missing certain lessons like P.E. or leaving the classroom to check mirrors or fix/hide perceived appearance flaw/s)
- Relationships (e.g. avoiding contact with peers, making or maintaining friendships)

HOW CAN MY SCHOOL HELP?

If you have been diagnosed with BDD, we recommend you share this with your school so they can understand your struggles and support you in school.

Your school may be able to make adjustments such as providing short breaks when your anxiety is high, extra time during exams or to complete homework, help with planning and goal setting, or helping you deal with any bullying or teasing. We always encourage school, family and therapist to work together so that you can be best supported towards your goals.

Please see *BDD guide for School Personnel* for further advice and tips for helping you in the classroom.

IN SUMMARY....

- BDD is a common anxiety problem where the person becomes very preoccupied with one or more features in their appearance
- You are not on your own: 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 you. BDD can be very distressing and make you feel very upset but if you 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 weight and engaging in unhealthy behaviours to limit/control weight. Although someone with BDD may restrict their food intake, the main preoccupation in BDD 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* BDD is an illness and we're not totally sure of its causes.

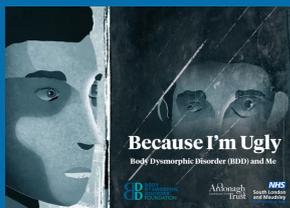
So far there is no scientific evidence to suggest that social media 'causes' BDD.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ADVICE

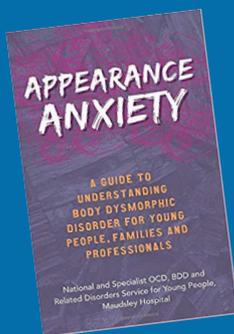
- www.bddfoundation.org
- www.ocdaction.org.uk
- National and Specialist OCD, BDD & Related Disorders Service
Email: ocdbdd.camhs@slam.nhs.uk
Phone: 020 3228 5222

USEFUL RESOURCES

<https://bddfoundation.org/home-new-animation/>



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 teachers and parents



QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WITH BDD

Don't let yourself believe you are stuck with BDD. Treatment will help you get better. After treatment I realised how many doors I'd shut in the past.

Don't refuse help and try to have a positive outlook on treatment – even if it seems futile it changed my life so much for the better and I'm so happy with the person I was able to become after treatment.