

Beating BDD Episode 3 – Hannah Lewis

For the third episode of Beating BDD, I spoke to Hannah Lewis. Hannah's BDD first appeared when she was about eight. Now 25 and in recovery, she's recently embarked on a PhD on how to prevent the disorder from developing in secondary-school age children.

'You might think that BDD's taken years of your life and it's never going to get better, But that's how I felt – and I've made a career of it!'

What's Hannah's PhD about?

[00:00:01] She's co-developing school-based interventions to prevent body image issues from developing among young people.

When did BDD appear and how did it manifest itself?

[00:02:50] At just eight or nine years old, she became very distressed about how she looked in a school photo.

[00:04:33] She didn't tell her parents because she believed she couldn't have been conceived naturally – so she felt suspicious of them.

[00:07:59] Hannah's suspicion extended to thinking that the men she dated were doing it as a joke.

What safety behaviours did she use?

[00:05:35] She started using makeup and scarves to camouflage her 'flaws' when she got to secondary school.

[00:06:17] Bullying validated the way she already saw herself.

[00:08:57] She avoided going outside to play with friends in the summer holidays.

How did she find out she had BDD and seek help?

[00:10:34] Hannah's rituals spiralled out of control when she went to university.

[00:12:56] The GP sent her to see a psychologist who diagnosed BDD.

[00:14:22] It was hard to admit she had BDD as it seemed like letting her guard down – until then she'd always 'got in there first' to tell people she was ugly.

What treatment did she have?

[00:15:22] Hannah had several rounds of CBT but found it hard to undo entrenched behaviours and ways of thinking.

[00:16:05] Recovery doesn't happen overnight but each time you revisit therapy it gets easier.

[00:16:40] Most effective has been recognising that people value her for who she is.

What role can support groups play in recovery?

[00:18:04] Sharing a common experience of BDD helps to overcome shame, guilt and isolation.

[00:18:34] People see that everyone else thinks they don't have BDD – they're just ugly.

[00:20:13] Attending the groups improves people's quality of life.

What's life like for Hannah now?

[00:21:15] She's learnt how to live her best life by managing her symptoms.

[00:22:15] Your appearance is never going to be on your CV. Qualities like humour and kindness are what count.

[00:23:42] With the right therapy and patience, it does get better.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org