

Beating BDD Episode 17 – Kitty Wallace

As head of operations for the BDD Foundation in the UK, Kitty Wallace supports sufferers and their families, raises awareness of the condition and much more. But she's also had her own experience of living with BDD – including a big relapse after catching glandular fever. Her story shows that recovery may not always be a straight line, but it's always possible.

“Be kind to yourself – you’ll get there in the end.”

How would Kitty describe where she's got to with her BDD?

[00:04.36] She's in a place she never could have imagined in 2015 when she was housebound and unable to work.

[00:05.12] She can still have blips, but she has faith she'll get through them.

[00:00.58] Kitty's BDD was okay during the UK's coronavirus lockdown. But like other sufferers, she's found the new rules around masks a little challenging.

What does her job for the Foundation involve and how does it help her?

[00:02.38] She covers a bit of everything, with the help of an active board of trustees.

[00:03.32] The job gives her a sense of a pride and as well as accountability. It's also lessened her feeling of shame.

When did Kitty's BDD start?

[00:05.39] Already an anxious child, her appearance became the focus of that anxiety at around 13 and got steadily worse.

[00:06.03] After finishing her A levels, Kitty didn't go off to university and started struggling to leave the house – and her parents realised something was very wrong.

[00:15.30] Experiences at school possibly helped explain why her anxiety was focused on her looks.

How did she get diagnosed and treated?

[00:06.51] A family member saw a documentary about BDD and recognised it was what Kitty had. Diagnosis and treatment followed, which was initially successful.

[00:07.27] She made big improvements and was able to go to university.

[00:08.43] Kitty then got a job in fashion, which was very hard work. She didn't feel she fitted in or looked how she should, and her BDD crept back.

How did she end up housebound?

[00:10.10] Kitty took a sabbatical to focus on her mental health. But she was so exhausted, she ended up with glandular fever.

[00:10.54] In the three years of that followed, everything felt too much, including the CBT. In 2015 she didn't leave the house for five months.

[00:12.10] When talking to her therapist one day, Kitty had a wake-up call. She started to reclaim her life by taking small steps.

What's been most helpful about treatment?

[00:18.52] Exposures are very scary but incredibly effective! It's about being creative, flexible and doing one exposure many times. It doesn't matter if they're very small.

[00:21.10] Attention training helps focus the brain back on the outside world.

[00:24.23] Self-compassion has helped Kitty to be less hard on herself generally.

How can sufferers benefit from attending support groups?

[00:27.00] Kitty co-facilitates a support group for the BDD Foundation, which makes attendees feel less isolated.

[00:28.23] Anxiety and shame come up a lot at these groups. But people with BDD are incredibly strong and shouldn't blame themselves.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org