Beating BDD Episode 22 – Andy Hall

Ten years ago, Andy used to spend eight hours a day in front of the mirror and couldn’t imagine ever being able to function. Now, he works full time and describes himself as 90% to 95% recovered.

“I’m no longer distracted from the things I want to do. I’m happier and healthier than ever.”

How is Andy’s life now?
[00:01.24] There’s a nice calm to life now, because of the things he no longer does (mirror checking, etc).
[00:05.05] Recovery has changed what he values in himself and others.
[00:16.30] Andy can do things he was terrified to do before, like shave his head. He’s content and no longer shackled by BDD behaviours.
[00:18.46] He’s now happy to date without worrying about judgment. He realises his worth and wouldn’t spend time with people who value the wrong things.

When and why did the BDD appear and how did it manifest itself?
[00:02.45] Although people told Andy he was good-looking, his self-esteem was so low that he only felt shame or worry.
[00:06.30] He showed signs of OCD behaviours when he was a child. Then he became obsessed by body hair during puberty.
[00:07.30] Years of bullying led him to have his ears pinned back when was 17. But after the operation things still didn’t look quite right – and his BDD escalated.

How did Andy get diagnosed and treated?
[00:25.18] He went to the GP while at university because he was feeling suicidal.
[00:10.50] He had therapy after quitting university but still believed the problem was physical. So he had another surgery. It helped at first but then he had a big blip.
[00:12.44] What really made the difference was specialist therapy for BDD.
[00:20.39] ERP (Exposure Response Prevention) helped him enormously by forcing him to face his fears.

What else did he find helpful?
[00:22.01] Andy makes a point of looking at people he wouldn’t normally get drawn to and reminding himself they all have equal worth.
[00:23.51] The therapist took pictures of him with wet hair and asked students to comment. They all said he looked fine, which disproved all his assumptions.
[00:28.40] He tries to avoid drawing too much attention to his body image and still takes a maintenance dose of escitalopram. Routine, sleep and exercise also help as do top-ups with counsellors and talking to friends.
[00:31.40] Helping others makes him happy too, like doing this podcast!

What would Andy say to someone who’s struggling with BDD?
[00:32.17] Speak to your doctor and challenge any taboos about discussing mental health. It’s your life and it can and will get better!

Resources
- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org