

## Beating BDD Episode 30 – Billie McPhilbin

Billie McPhilbin is a trainee counselling psychologist at the University of Manchester and a lead facilitator on the BDD Foundation's Overcoming BDD Programme. In this episode, she shares her experiences of struggling with BDD in her late teens, the steps she took towards recovery and the lessons she learned along the way.

*“What helps me now is to think about what other things I can do in my life that give my life worth and give my life value. You know, my partner, my family, my friends. It's just thinking about other things that make me who I am that are not part of my appearance at all.”*

### How life is for Billie now

[00:49] Billie's experiences today are worlds apart from when her BDD was at its worst. She's much more relaxed around other people.

[01:41] Her experience also led her to study psychology and to volunteer for the BDD Foundation on its Overcoming BDD programme.

[02:28] Billie describes what the programme covers and how she has personally benefited as a facilitator. Everyone is learning from the others all the time.

### Billie's BDD story: when it started and how it affected her life

[04:33] As a teen, she already felt as if she didn't belong anywhere. Then two significant relationships in her life began to break down.

[05:31] She started feeling an overwhelming sense of shame and became full of self-criticism. Then, at around 16, she developed acne.

[07:15] When Billie was out, she would avoid mirrors altogether; at home, she would study and pick at her skin for hours.

[09:33] Her social relationships really suffered. She constantly sought reassurance and started interactions by pointing out her perceived ugliness.

[10:32] She felt very alone and experienced suicidal thoughts. But she never told anyone but her partner how she felt.

### How Billie discovered she might have BDD

[11:59] She read accounts of BDD sufferers online but didn't feel she qualified – she was still functioning and she had acne. Now, she recognises it's very normal and just a skin condition.

[14:51] In 2019 she heard Nicole Schnackenberg give a talk about shame at the BDD Foundation Conference, and it chimed with her enormously. After that she felt more comfortable saying she had BDD.

[17:54] She felt relief that her experience was known by other people and being researched and discussed.

### Overcoming BDD

[18:49] Billie was never diagnosed with BDD or treated for it. But her studies and other therapy helped her be aware of what she was experiencing and what to do about it. She also benefited from leaving home to go to university.

[22:44] After her dad passed away, she realised she needed to be more authentically herself with others. She used lots of techniques from the Overcoming BDD programme at this point.

[25:10] Attention refocusing helped Billie to become more mindful about feeling the urge to pick her skin at the mirror. She also applied self-compassion.

#### Staying well and support for others

[28:35] Self-compassion is easy when things are going okay but when they aren't, it's really hard. So now Billie tries to be kind to her body and does mindfulness.

[30:03] She also finds it helpful to think about other things that make her who she is that aren't part of her appearance at all.

[30:50] Having BDD is a lesson in empathy. It's led Billie to pursue a career in mental health. It's also made her realise that an appearance focus is normalised in Western culture, but there's so much more to us all than that.

[34:05] For people who are suffering badly with BDD, Billie suggests taking things one step at a time and to remember you're not alone.

#### **Resources**

- The BDD Foundation: [bddfoundation.org](http://bddfoundation.org)

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