

## Beating BDD Episode 32

Our guest for this episode is Danny Gray, whose organisation JAAQ (or Just Ask a Question) is the podcast's champion sponsor as a result of the Big Give campaign. Danny tells us about his 18-year journey with BDD and how he manages to stay well today.

*"My BDD is the best it's ever been... I've learned how to manage it a lot better."*

### From constant struggle to daily management

[01:28] Danny is in a much better place today than when his BDD was at its worst. BDD thoughts probably take up about 20% of his headspace now compared with 100% then.

[02:54] If someone had told him back then he'd be living the life he has now, he wouldn't have believed them. He couldn't see a way out at that point.

### The search for perfection

[03:39] Danny's BDD took hold from about 12, when kids at school teased him about his ears.

[04:34] He quickly became so obsessed that his mum decided to get his ears pinned back.

[06:07] Danny didn't feel the operation had gone far enough so he continued to obsess about his ears. He started safety behaviours, like growing his hair over his ears. This led to him getting obsessed with his hair and clothes and spending ages getting ready to go out.

[08:00] By 18-19, it was taking him three hours. He wouldn't go out until he felt he looked perfect and even then he would turn back and get changed if he spotted something 'wrong'.

### How BDD affected his relationships

[10:10] It was hard for Danny's mum because he'd need to release the stress he felt when getting ready, so he'd shout and punch holes in the wall.

[10:54] His friends were very accommodating, which released the pressure. But even then, he never told anyone how he was feeling. He felt people wouldn't understand.

### A new stage of life, a new focus for the BDD

[12:19] At 19, Danny's mum paid for him to have his ears pinned back again, but he still felt they didn't go far enough. So he had a third procedure.

[12:57] From aged 20 to 30 the obsession became about hair and clothes. His hair had to be styled exactly right and his clothes had to feel a certain way. Then at 28, he spotted a gap in his hairline (which was just the crown of his hair) and his BDD intensified.

[15:00] Danny was constantly checking – taking photos, looking in the mirror and researching hair loss.

### Reaching crisis point

[15:45] The last two years (28-30) were the worst. Danny was masking with drink and drugs and feeling worse the next day. Eventually, at 30, he confided in his mother-in-law and everyone stepped in to help.

[17:13] He did a lot of talking and went to see a hair specialist who said he wasn't losing his hair.

[17:48] Danny's girlfriend had suggested he had BDD when he was about 26 but he was never formally diagnosed.

### Learning to manage BDD

[19:06] Danny didn't have therapy – instead, he analysed what was triggering the BDD and did things to reduce the anxiety. For example, if he felt himself spiralling about getting ready, he'd have break then go back to it. This tactic still works for him now.

[22:17] While therapy wasn't for him at the time, Danny now recognises the value of evidence-based CBT-based treatment for the disorder.

[23:48] When Danny was in his mid-teens, he wasn't too badly affected by his BDD, so he just got on with things. If he'd understood what he was dealing with, it wouldn't have taken him as long to ask for help. This is why he thinks it's important to act early, not dismiss the early signs.

[25:51] Now he's aware of his BDD and what might trigger it, he can see the signs that it's taking hold and can do something about it. Awareness and education are massive.

### The importance of hope

[27:25] Danny has created two businesses, both borne out of his lived experience of BDD. The second, JAAQ, is a mental health platform that gives people information early, when they don't want to talk about how they feel. He loves what he does and it doesn't feel like a job.

[29:17] When you're at crisis point, you can't imagine things will ever get better. But they will.

### **Resources**

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

### **Sponsors**

Thank you to our champion sponsor JAAQ (Just Ask A Question), the new mental health platform designed to give you the right information, from the right people, in a way that's never been done before.

Thank you also to our community sponsors:

- Nightingale Hospital is a private mental health hospital located in central London. It provides specialist treatment for OCD, BDD and related disorders in its dedicated inpatient unit and day programme.
- Orri is a specialist eating disorder treatment service providing compassionate, multi-disciplinary care through tailored outpatient, day care and online programmes.
- Blondes Fine Art is a fine art dealership based in Hertfordshire and proud to support Beating BDD.