

Beating BDD Episode 35

This episode features Kim Booker, whose body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) first emerged when she was just five years old. Now the mum of a two-and-a-half-year-old, Kim is harnessing what she calls the BDD warrior within to raise awareness of the disorder while continuing with her own recovery. She shares great insights, particularly around the decision to become a parent and the complex impact of repeated cosmetic treatments.

“If you can live with something so mentally crippling, that’s extreme strength – acknowledge it.”

The emergence of BDD and early vulnerabilities

[09:43] Kim grew up in a very challenging household where she never felt safe or anchored. Her parents owned a gym, which created an appearance-orientated environment.

[11:00] Kim believes she is neurodivergent, and having moved to nine different schools, she never felt like she fitted in or belonged. Her brain used BDD as a way of coping with anxiety.

[11:55] She also noticed that her father and aunt had behaviours around appearance.

Adolescence, escapism, and identity

[12:57] Kim first showed BDD behaviours when she was about five years old, in infant school.

[14:44] When she started wearing a small amount of make-up, she suddenly received attention from boys, which led her to attach her identity to appearance.

[15:50] From around age 15, Kim began drinking as an escape from feeling lonely and unable to connect fully with people. This led to unsafe, scary moments.

[17:20] She ended up hanging out with an older crowd and being groomed by an older man.

The journey through cosmetic treatments

[19:00] At 18, Kim got lip filler to try to achieve a desired appearance and conceal her perceived “gummy smile”.

[19:42] Following a series of horrible events, and an attempt to take her own life, Kim decided to become a fitness bikini model. This was an attempt to gain ultimate control over her body and seek validation through her appearance, which deepened the obsession.

[21:02] Later, a coach suggested fillers because she had lost fat from her face. This began Kim’s journey with the “hell of filler”. Now, she can see how strange she used to look.

[23:35] Kim eventually underwent rhinoplasty after excessive use of filler weakened her cartilage.

Motherhood and the post-baby shift

[24:32] When Kim became pregnant, her filler migrated and puffed out due to hormones and water retention. After dissolving the filler, she realised it had been hiding 10 years of aging, and she didn’t leave the house for two weeks.

[03:35] Kim says there are two parts to her recovery story: one before and one after becoming a mum. BDD used to be much more dominant; now, she feels like a completely different person.

[05:08] The hormones and sleep deprivation have also taught her about what triggers her BDD.

[06:09] It’s important to her now to figure out who she is without the masks she’s always worn.

Hormones, cycles, and therapy

[27:20] Kim has realised that many of her decisions, including those related to treatments, were made during her luteal phase (when oestrogen drops dramatically). In this phase, her BDD tends to intensify, especially due to her struggles with PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder).

[28:10] She advises women to get to know their cycle and be aware of how it can affect BDD.

[33:40] While Kim found the BDD Foundation's group CBT programme very helpful, she was wrapped up in her pregnancy at the time. One-to-one CBT has been more beneficial, including by helping her address the identity crisis she faced after realising BDD had sucked the joy out of everything.

[36:00] She is now focused on finding "creative Kim" again, developing hobbies, and resisting the urge to be a perfectionist or follow others to fit in.

Advocacy and the BDD warrior

[07:40] Kim's drive for advocacy stems from a deeply ingrained sense of justice and a feeling of not being seen or heard as a child. She realised she didn't want anyone else to feel what she had felt.

[30:35] She began writing about her sober journey and BDD on social media, which led her to discover and volunteer for the BDD Foundation.

[32:08] This involvement gave her a sense of purpose and community and made her feel less lonely.

What she would say to those thinking of becoming parents or who are struggling with BDD

[39:40] Kim encourages anyone with BDD who truly wants to become a parent not to let BDD stop them. She advises having eyes open to the challenges, securing a strong support system, and considering family therapy with a partner before the baby arrives to define roles and values.

[41.05] She emphasises that individuals with BDD can be "cycle breakers" who strive to make sure their children feel seen, felt, and heard.

[42.05] Kim's message to those struggling is to connect with others and to keep getting help.

Recovery isn't linear; every breakdown provides a breakthrough and an opportunity for learning.

[43.30] She stresses that BDD sufferers are BDD warriors who show "extreme strength" by being able to function and go to work despite their mental struggles. She reminds listeners that they deserve the right to happiness.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org

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