

## Beating BDD Episode 37

For much of the time Mark Brown lived with BDD – around 30 years – he looked as if he was functioning from the outside. But inside he was living under what he calls “a dome of shame and disgust”. Now, after lots of hard work and therapy, he says he’s much more present in his life and his old life with BDD feels like a distant memory.

*“Don’t give up. You deserve to be happy in life – everyone does.”*

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### Living with BDD thoughts on a constant loop

**[01:26]** When Mark’s BDD was severe, he could be in a room full of people yet feel completely absent, consumed by intrusive thoughts and intense shame.

**[01:46]** Today, his attention is largely focused on the present moment and the people around him, rather than on BDD. This shift has allowed him to feel like an active participant in life rather than an observer.

**[02:55]** He explains how BDD thoughts weren’t neutral or fleeting, but came with overwhelming feelings of shame, disgust and self-loathing, replaying relentlessly from morning to night.

**[07:00]** Now, he says all of that has gone and life feels very different.

### Early signs and how BDD took hold

**[08:13]** Mark recalls early preoccupations with appearance in primary school, including feeling self-conscious about his nose and other features.

**[09:18]** In his early teens, acne on his nose became the focal point of his BDD. Teasing and comments from others helped the disorder take hold more firmly.

**[11:38]** Mirror checking, squeezing spots, and repeated attempts to “fix” his appearance quickly became obsessive and self-reinforcing behaviours.

### Functioning on the outside, suffering on the inside

**[13:45]** Despite intense internal distress, Mark continued to “perform” outwardly – attending school, socialising, and achieving academically – while feeling miserable inside.

**[15:17]** Friends and family had no idea what he was going through. To others, he appeared outgoing and popular, masking the reality of his internal suffering.

### University, identity and early insight

**[16:16]** Mark explains how BDD, dyslexia and undiagnosed neurodivergence affected his ability to study and apply himself at school and university, despite strong abilities.

**[17:57]** He studied psychology at university in part to see if it might help him.

**[21:25]** Having girlfriends provided the validation Mark sought, but the BDD meant he wasn’t easy to be with, especially when it wasn’t in the open.

**[23:13]** During his psychology studies, he began to recognise that his experience matched descriptions of BDD, gaining insight early even though emotional change came much later.

**[25:14]** Reading *Overcoming Body Image Problems Including Body Dysmorphia* was a pivotal moment, as the behaviours described exactly matched his experience.

### Exposure, relapse and learning compassion

**[28:12]** Mark describes attempting exposure work largely on his own, often pushing himself too hard and too fast, which sometimes led to setbacks.

[32:40] He explains exposure and response prevention (ERP), reframing it as “exposure and response acceptance”, emphasising allowing thoughts and feelings rather than fighting them.  
[36:44] While Mark did a lot of the right things to “starve” his BDD, recovery was not linear. He experienced progress followed by crashes, requiring persistence, support and repeated recommitment to psychological explanations rather than appearance-based ones.

### **The role of therapy and community**

[39:50] Working with a specialist therapist was crucial in helping Mark sustain recovery, address underlying patterns, and develop a more compassionate relationship with himself.

[36:40] Compassion – initially unfamiliar and inaccessible – became transformative once his BDD symptoms reduced enough for it to take root.

[46:32] Mark speaks powerfully about the empathy and shared understanding within BDD Foundation support groups and on the Overcoming BDD programme he volunteers for, describing them as spaces where people truly “get it”.

### **Staying well and a message of hope**

[47:27] Volunteering with the BDD Foundation helps Mark stay grounded, connected, and reminded of what matters in recovery.

[50:20] His message to those struggling is clear: BDD is not your fault, and you cannot recover with the same tools that created the problem. New information, support, and guidance are essential – and recovery *is* possible.

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## **Resources**

- The BDD Foundation: [bddfoundation.org](http://bddfoundation.org)
- *Overcoming Body Image Problems including Body Dysmorphia* by David Veale, Rob Willson and Alex Clarke

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