

Beating BDD Episode 41

Our guest, Mia Hill, describes how an obsession with perceived flaws in her appearance took over her life during the COVID-19 lockdown. Already living with OCD, she found herself trapped in a relentless cycle of filming, analysing and scrutinising her appearance. Today, Mia works for OCD-UK, serves as an ambassador for the BDD Foundation and openly shares her experiences to help others find hope and recovery.

“There are so many beautiful things to look forward to and none of them concern your appearance.”

Life beyond BDD

[01:35] Mia reflects on how different life is today and how, when her BDD was bad, she never imagined she would be able to do any of the things she does now.

[02:36] She describes the liberation and empowerment she feels now, posting videos of herself removing her makeup and showing her face close-up on social media.

When BDD first appeared

[03:15] Mia’s concerns about her appearance emerged during her teenage years but escalated dramatically during the COVID-19 lockdown, when she was around 17. Her behaviour became extreme because of the thoughts she was having.

[04:08] Mia had lived with OCD since she was a child, but this was different and confusing. She didn’t know what she was experiencing.

[04:36] She spent hours filming herself, replaying videos frame by frame and zooming in on different facial features. At its worst, BDD occupied every waking moment and even appeared in her dreams.

[05:57] Her main concerns centred on her nose, jawline, forehead, skin texture and eyebrows, all of which felt overwhelmingly significant despite being invisible to others.

Isolation and depression

[07:00] Mia’s family were very worried about her – they didn’t understand or know how to talk to her about it. If she asked for reassurance, she’d analyse everything about the response.

[08:10] Mia increasingly withdrew from her family, even in the same house. Schoolwork became very difficult. Her thoughts and compulsions consumed so much mental energy that she struggled to engage with anything.

[09:17] Even conversations with friends became dominated by reassurance seeking. She hid behind makeup, hairstyles and clothing in an attempt to control what people could see.

[10:26] BDD led Mia into the darkest period of her life. She experienced severe depression and, for the first time, suicidal thoughts. That’s when she realised something needed to change.

Seeking help and receiving a diagnosis

[12:51] Mia was already having therapy for OCD but initially hadn’t wanted to reveal her feelings because of shame and embarrassment. When she started having very dark thoughts, she realised she had nothing to lose.

[13:05] When she finally disclosed what she’d been experiencing, her therapist recognised the symptoms and said that it sounded like BDD.

[13:21] Mia initially struggled to accept the diagnosis because she believed many of the misconceptions she had seen online about what BDD was. These misconceptions are part of what motivated her to become an advocate and help raise awareness.

[16:21] BDD also convinced her that she didn’t have a disorder – she was just ugly.

Recovery through community, therapy and exposure

[17:24] A turning point came when Mia discovered other people's stories through the BDD Foundation. Kim Booker's experience resonated particularly strongly with her.

[19:21] Therapy focused on gradually reducing compulsions and using exposure and response prevention (ERP). The BDD community also played a huge role, acting as a support group on social media and showing Mia that she wasn't alone.

[23:44] Her exposures gradually progressed from small challenges, like delaying compulsions, to leaving the house without makeup and her hair up. Now, she can do that without thinking.

[23:58] Mia describes OCD and BDD as 'like sisters, not twins' – the cycles are very similar, but while OCD caused her anxiety, BDD made her depressed.

[27:44] Recovery wasn't linear, but over time, Mia regained control of her life. She now sees recovery not as eliminating BDD (or OCD) entirely but as refusing to let it dictate how she lives.

Learning not to judge

[30:42] Today, Mia rarely engages in the compulsions that once dominated her life. Instead, she views her body neutrally – seeing it as something that keeps her going rather than something that needs fixing or analysing.

[34:19] Looking back, Mia believes her experiences have made her stronger, more patient and more aware that people often carry struggles that aren't immediately visible.

[36:08] Her message to anyone currently struggling is simple: it won't always feel this bad. She is proof that recovery is possible and that there really is light at the end of the tunnel.

[37:05] She encourages listeners to keep going, because "There are so many things to look forward to and none of them concerns your appearance."

Resources

- **The BDD Foundation:** bddfoundation.org

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