

Beating BDD Episode 45

A decade ago, Katrina King was so overwhelmed by shame that she struggled to speak in a group. Today, she performs improv, does public speaking and co-facilitates the BDD Foundation's Overcoming BDD programme. In this conversation, Kat talks about how BDD and profound personal losses made her world feel painfully small, and how determination, exposure and connection have helped her build a bigger life.

"There is a whole world out there that is safe and accepting and loving."

How Kat's life has changed

[02:53] Speaking at the BDD Foundation conference was a powerful milestone for Kat. The supportive community helped her feel able to step out of her comfort zone. Knowing that her story might help someone else made the experience especially meaningful.

[04:31] Life with BDD ends up very small. Now, Kat works, performs improv and clowning, and runs her own workshops.

How her BDD started

[05:28] Kat remembers feeling shame from a very young age. When she discovered she needed glasses, she became frightened that people would reject her if they found out. Even when it turned out to be fine, the underlying fear of being judged and losing connection stayed with her.

[07:20] After her mum died, her BDD became much more severe. She was living with constant distress and hiding how she really felt from the people around her. The safety behaviours were critical, but they were never enough.

[08:22] On the outside, life looked good: Kat had managed to get a degree and a job in financial services. But the disconnect between that and how she felt inside fed into her distress.

[09:22] In the decade before her mum died, Kat spent money on appointments, skin treatments and products to try and feel comfortable with her appearance, but the shame never went away. Even when she received compliments, she remained convinced she wasn't good enough.

[12:12] Kat describes the lengths she went to hide the fact she wore glasses, because of the stories she carried about yourself. She's still quite avoidant about certain things, like going home to Ireland where she'd see people she knows.

Reaching a turning point

[14:52] Kat describes the exhausting contrast between appearing to function on the outside and feeling intensely uncomfortable in her body, like every gaze was a threat. Eventually, she reached a point where she couldn't continue living that way.

[16:24] Receiving a BDD diagnosis in 2018 helped her make sense of what she was experiencing. She also began EMDR therapy and gradually came to understand that the level of distress and fixation was central to the problem.

[20:12] After another devastating loss, Kat some took time off and barely left the house. Eventually, she began exploring new ways to heal, found a different kind of work and decided to "fight for a better life for myself".

Learning to face fear

[21:10] Exposure therapy and behavioural experiments became important parts of Kat's recovery. She started with small challenges, such as dancing in the park, gradually showing

herself that she could be seen, feel uncomfortable and still be okay. She's also done lots of improv, clowning and evening eye gazing to build up that part of herself.

[23:34] Kat explains how she broke down her dream of public speaking into manageable steps. Even standing at the front of a room was initially overwhelming, but practising little by little helped her build confidence.

[24:37] She reflects on how slowly recovery can happen, and why it matters to take small steps, pause when needed and try again. It's also important to recognise how far you've come.

[26:33] She describes how EMDR works and how those sessions helped her recovery.

[29:48] Kat has learned to see her BDD differently. Rather than automatically assuming that distress means something is wrong with her appearance, she sometimes uses it as a warning sign that a situation or relationship isn't good for her.

Finding connection and giving back

[31:13] Discovering the BDD Foundation's support groups showed Kat that she wasn't alone. She later completed the Overcoming BDD programme and became a co-facilitator, helping others while continuing to learn from their shared experiences.

[33:00] Kat talks about the relief of recognising your own thoughts in someone else's story and being able to find the humour as a group. Recovery, she says, isn't necessarily about making BDD disappear; it can be about learning to build a bigger life around it.

[34:29] Kat reflects on how she'd like her future to look, including building intimacy in her relationships. Her relationship with herself is changing; she's learning to share more of her "flawed self", re-parent herself during difficult times and respond with more compassion.

[39:22] Her message to anyone struggling is to acknowledge how hard things feel, but to try to step back into the world when you can. There's a whole world out there for you beyond the isolation BDD can create.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org

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