

Beating BDD Episode 4 – Gareth Stephens

For this episode I spoke to Gareth Stephens. In just eight years Gareth has gone from being too ill with BDD to work to helping others recover from anxiety disorders as a CBT therapist in south London. His interview shows that however bad things seem, it is possible to make a full recovery from the disorder.

‘In the last five or six years I’ve probably had two dysmorphic thoughts. On both occasions I looked in the mirror, then thought, “No, I don’t do this anymore.” And I was able to walk away and get on with my day.’

When did his BDD appear and how did it manifest itself?

[00:04:31] He has distinct memories of instances that made him very aware of his appearance from aged 8.

[00:05:36] The anxiety became a real problem at about 15-17 ears and got progressively worse. Leaving university after three months was a defining moment.

[00:14:14] His appearance concerns related to aspects of his face and body.

How did his BDD affect his life?

[00:01:20] A typical day involved spending lots of time scrutinising pictures and videos and feeling progressively worse.

[00:09:15] After dropping out of university, he had 8-9 years of being very affected. He was too anxious to hold down jobs and started having panic attacks.

[00:13:00] He became very socially isolated.

How did he find out he had BDD and why did it take so long?

[00:07:15] Gareth didn’t know what the problem was – just knew he was experiencing unpleasant feelings and situations.

[00:09:15] At about 24 he saw his GP about the panic attacks. This led to 4-5 years of unsuccessful treatment from psychologists who didn’t understand BDD.

[00:11:40] It was after seeing the programme Too Ugly for Love that he made an appointment to see David Veale and got a diagnosis.

What specialist treatment did he have?

[00:15:42] He undertook 12 weeks of in-patient treatment.

[00:16:42] The therapy involved stopping maintaining behaviours and changing his relationship with his thoughts.

[00:17:54] Doing the things that made him uncomfortable was also key.

[00:17:02] There were two Eureka moments after about three and six weeks of treatment.

What else helped him to get better?

[00:13:25] Gareth met an ex-girlfriend through an online support group who helped him to see that things could be different.

[00:22:57] Supportive relationships have helped. He’s also done courses and set up/attended groups relating to other anxiety disorders, as well as used techniques like diaphragmatic breathing.

What’s life like for Gareth now?

[00:00:45] He’s a CBT therapist seeing patients and overseeing trainees.

[00:25:58] He doesn't have dysmorphic thoughts any more – in fact, he even has positive ones!

What advice would he give to people suffering with BDD?

[00:29:38] It's important to open a door in your mind to the possibility that the way you see yourself may not be the reality.

[00:30:10] Have some faith in your therapist and the therapy and push yourself as hard as you can.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org