

Beating BDD Episode 10 – Oliver Butcher, part 1

For this episode – the first of two – I spoke to Oliver Butcher, who’s currently in the middle of treatment for his BDD. It’s the first time he’s spoken publicly about his struggle with the condition, so we’re especially grateful for him for having the courage to come forward. You’ll find the second half of Oliver’s interview in episode 11.

“If I think back to a year ago, there’s absolutely no way I would have been able to come to London [and do this recording]. There was just, go to work, come home, and that was good enough. But that’s not how I want to live my life anymore.”

What makes Oliver want to talk about this today?

[00:00.43] Speaking up is about shedding the remaining shame. This is a normal, widespread condition.

Where is he with his recovery?

[00:01.25] He’s a year into treatment. He’s not cured but he’s come a long way.

[00:03.01] Oliver’s thinking about how to reclaim the things he enjoys. It’s also important to recognise how far you’ve come.

[00:04.10] Having a supportive employer (John Lewis) has helped enormously. They understand his issue with timekeeping!

When and why did his BDD first appear?

[00:06.47] When Oliver was 8 or 9, he saw a holiday video of himself and thought, is that really what I look like?

[00:09.38] The BDD behaviours started when he got a smartphone at about 13. It ingrained the idea that he had to be perfect.

[00:12.25] His family describe the onset as when Oliver was ‘taken hostage’; for Oliver, BDD is like having a monkey on your back.

What made it get worse?

[00:16.06] Oliver’s parents separated when he was about 12, and shortly afterwards, his grandfather died. Then at 16, his life went on hold when he broke his leg.

[00:18.22] He had to spend a long time in bed recuperating and went inward. He spent the next few years using avoidance tactics and scrutinising himself.

[00:25.14] Changing his hairstyle was when the behaviours got really bad.

How did it manifest itself?

[00:13.01] Oliver still has physical symptoms from his BDD, like a tingling feeling from anxiety. Standing in front of mirrors for hours used to take a physical toll too.

[00:21.29] His preoccupation has always been on his hair (its thinness and the fear of going bald) and his nose.

[00:27.55] His main focus was how his hair looked. Every day he’d get up at about 4am to be at work for 8am. Challenging those behaviours – including checking in the toilets at work – has been difficult.

What’s helped him to recover?

[00:20.49] Oliver’s job and his family have been Oliver’s saviours. Having a focus has been incredibly important.

[00:24.44] The biggest change has been being more at peace with himself as a person.

[00:26.26] Therapy has taught Oliver that it's the BDD mind that's lying.

What advice does he have for others?

[00:26.41] Try not to listen to the voice in your head that says you're not good enough unless you do your behaviours.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org