

Beating BDD Episode 6 – Alanah Bagwell

My guest for this episode was Alanah Bagwell. Just a few years ago, Alanah was suffering from BDD so severely that she missed whole chunks of her education. Today, she's something of a BDD celebrity, appearing on several TV programmes and doing press interviews to raise awareness of the disorder. And like other recent interviewees, she's also studying to become a clinical psychologist to help others.

'If I compare myself to 5-7 years ago, it's absolutely incredible. And the days I don't think about it – which are actually really common now – are just amazing.'

What's Alanah's life like now?

[00:04:05] She's gone from being truant from school to studying for a Master's

[00:01:03] The media work is hard to do but if it helps just one person, it's worth it.

[00:28:30] She's been able to do loads of things she would have seen as impossible at one time.

When did Alanah's BDD appear and how did it manifest itself?

[00:06:10] She started to feel more anxious at school at about 13.

[00:07:23] The longer she was away from school the harder it became to go back. She was self-harming at this stage too.

[00:08:32] Alanah was housebound for about five years. And when she did start leaving the house, she wasn't able to go back to school full-time.

[00:21:10] She experienced both deep depression/numbness and intense anger/anxiety.

How did BDD affect her family? How did they respond?

[00:09:57] Alanah's mum thought she was depressed so tried to get her out of the house for drives and day trips.

[00:10:34] Her absence from school caused lots of arguments at home. But while she wanted to be at school, she just couldn't do it.

[00:23:58] She's now very close to her family and her siblings can even joke about it.

What treatment did she have and when?

[00:11:53] Alanah's mum had noticed she'd been self-harming so they went to the GP, who referred her to CAMs. They gave family therapy which didn't help.

[00:13:35] She found out about BDD by googling 'I'm so ugly I could die'. She recognised herself from the checklist of symptoms on the BDD Foundation's website.

[00:15:39] She was already having CBT by this stage but the therapist recommended seeing a specialist. So she joined a BDD trial at the Maudsley.

[00:16:30] The following year she went to the North London Priory for five months as an in-patient. Thanks to the intensive support there, she started to recover.

What was it like being diagnosed?

[00:16:04] The assessment at the Maudsley was the first time she was able to write down what her main concern was.

[00:17:53] Believing in the diagnosis comes later – acting 'as if' is so important.

[00:18:53] She spent a long time doing exposures and living as if she didn't have BDD. While she still believed she was just ugly, she was much happier than before.

Has she gained anything positive from having had BDD?

[00:25:00] Alanah's very close to her mum – and great at doing make-up!!

[00:25:16] She wants to work in the BDD field in the future.

[00:26.47] She's really aware of, and speaks openly about, mental health.

What's helped her most and what advice would she give to others?

[00:27:30] She was lucky enough to be able to do exposures with others at the Priory. Not sharing the same anxieties meant they could do exposures together.

[00:29:51] Routine is really important – make sure you get up and out every day. And know your triggers – don't let BDD trick you back into old habits.

[00:33:00] She advises sufferers to hold in mind that it does get better, keep support close, educate yourself and be creative with your exposures.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org
- [No Body's Perfect](#) (BBC Documentary, now on YouTube)