

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

A Guide For Teachers and Other Professionals



WHAT IS BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER (BDD)?

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is a psychological condition where a person becomes *very* preoccupied with one or more features in physical appearance, e.g. nose, skin, hair, etc. The concern can be very specific (e.g. "my nose is too big") or it may be vague (e.g. "I feel ugly").

People with BDD engage in behaviours to 'fix' or hide the perceived flaw/s that are difficult to resist or control (e.g. frequently checking mirrors, seeking reassurance, etc).

BDD can seriously affect a person's daily life, including school, social life and relationships. It is very common for young people with BDD to feel anxious, upset, depressed because of their appearance concerns and experience life as being a struggle.

Common signs of BDD

- Obsessive concern about one or more features
- Looking in mirrors/reflective surfaces a lot or avoiding them altogether
- Avoiding pictures
- Going to a lot of effort to conceal perceived flaw/s (e.g. with make-up, clothes, postures or other means)
- Constantly comparing one's appearance to others
- Frequently seeking reassurance about appearance
- Avoiding social situations
- Excessive skin picking
- ...

Impact of BDD

People with BDD worry **a lot more** than others about their appearance.

They may spend several hours per day *worrying* about how they look and trying to fix or hide their appearance.

As a result, social isolation, social anxiety and depression are very common in BDD.

WHAT CAUSES BDD?

No one knows exactly what causes BDD, but research suggests it is a combination of different (risk) factors, such as:

- Genetics
- Chemical imbalances in the brain
- Exposure to frightening or upsetting experiences (e.g. bullying, abuse, life stresses)
- Perfectionism

Whatever it is that causes BDD, we know there are effective treatments available to help people overcome BDD.

Inviting the young person to complete the BDD screening questions in the blue box opposite may help them to understand if BDD may be something they are struggling with.

BDD Stats

BDD often begins in adolescence, but it can start earlier in childhood. BDD affects up to 2% of teens; this means that, if in your school there are approximately 2,000 kids, round about 40 will suffer from BDD.

It is important to remind the young person **they are not alone!**

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE GET HELP FOR BDD?

It is difficult to manage BDD alone. Having supportive people on the young person's side will make it easier for them to get the right help.

There are lots of ways young people can get help:

- Tell someone they trust
- Make a GP appointment (taking this information leaflet with them to their appointment)
- If the GP agrees they may be struggling with BDD or appearance anxiety they will refer the young person to Child and Adolescent Services (CAMHS) (called Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services (EWMHS) in some geographical areas.

The good news is that there are effective treatments for BDD! The national guidelines for BDD recommend two treatment options, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) for BDD and/or medication.

BDD SCREENING QUESTIONS

BDD Screening Questions

1. Do you spend an hour or more everyday worrying about your appearance?
2. Do you find yourself carrying out lots of behaviours to cope with your appearance worries (e.g. mirror checking, grooming routines, comparing your appearance with others, etc.)?
3. Do your appearance worries upset you a lot and/or get in the way of daily activities (e.g. socialising, going to school, leisure activities etc.)?
4. Are your appearance concerns **exclusively** focused on being too fat or weighing too much?

If you answered "yes" to questions 1) to 3) and "no" to question 4), it is possible you may be experiencing BDD.

Caution! Please note that the above questions are intended to screen for BDD, NOT to diagnose it; the answers indicated above can suggest that BDD is present but can't give a definite diagnosis.

"I have to do my hair every morning until it looks right... This means washing, straightening, styling, and then starting again if it doesn't turn out. Usually I don't get into school before lunch time."

Steven, 17 years



BDD AND SCHOOL

BDD often interferes in school-life by making a young person late to school or missing school altogether.

It can cause disruption throughout the school day and affect school performance (e.g. making it difficult to concentrate on work, having to leave the classroom to check mirrors, feeling anxious around others, avoiding contact with others, missing certain lessons like P.E. etc.)

HOW CAN SCHOOL HELP?

If a young person has been diagnosed with BDD, we recommend they share this with their school to enable understanding and support.

Schools may be able to make adjustments such as providing short breaks when anxiety is high, extra time during exams or to complete homework, help with planning and goal setting, and addressing any bullying or teasing. We always encourage school, family and therapist to work together so the young person can be best supported towards their goals.

Please see the *BDD Guide for Educational Professionals* for further advice and tips for helping young people with BDD in the school setting.

IN SUMMARY....

- BDD is a common anxiety problem where the person becomes very preoccupied with one or more features in their appearance
- BDD affects up to 2 young people in every 100
- We don't really know what causes BDD. It is likely to be a combination of different factors... but we do know how to treat it!
- There are specialists who know about BDD who can offer support. BDD can be very distressing experience...it is also highly treatable!

BDD MYTH BUSTERS

It's NOT about vanity!

People with BDD often describe feeling fundamentally inadequate, unacceptable, unlovable because of how they look.

It is important to remember that BDD is a mental health condition, and in fact a very serious one.

It is NOT an eating disorder!

BDD and Eating Disorders (ED) are two different mental health conditions.

In ED, the concern is exclusively about weight and engaging in unhealthy behaviours to limit/control weight. Although someone with BDD may restrict their food intake, the main preoccupation is not exclusively about weight.

It CAN affect any gender!

BDD can affect any gender and in similar ways

It's NOT caused by social media!

The idea that BDD can be 'caused' by social media is a popular myth.

Social media can affect self image, but remember, BDD is an illness and we're not totally sure of its causes.

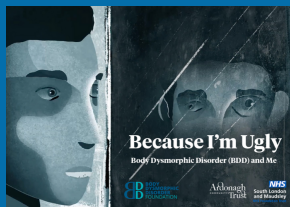
While it is known biological and environmental factors are involved, there is no evidence social media 'causes' BDD.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ADVICE

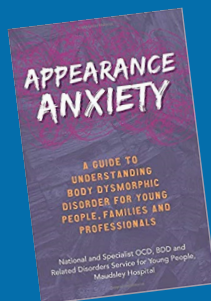
- www.bddfoundation.org
- www.ocdaction.org.uk
- National and Specialist OCD, BDD & Related Disorders Service
Email: ocdbdd.camhs@slam.nhs.uk
Phone: 020 3228 5222

USEFUL RESOURCES

<https://bddfoundation.org/home-new-animation/>



Appearance Anxiety: A Guide to Understanding Body Dysmorphic Disorder for Young People, Families and Professionals
(Jessica Kingsley Publishers)



Check out our guide on BDD for young people and school personnel



QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WITH BDD

“Don't let yourself believe you are stuck with BDD. Treatment will help you get better. After treatment I realised how many doors I'd shut in the past.”

“Don't refuse help and try to have a positive outlook on treatment – even if it seems futile it changed my life so much for the better. I'm so happy with the person I was able to become after treatment.”

