

Beating BDD Episode 21 – Flora Howarth

Flora Howarth suffered with BDD alongside an eating disorder until just 18 months ago. Since then, she's made truly inspirational progress in overcoming the disorder, and built up a personal toolkit of tricks that will be really helpful to listeners.

“There’s a fulfilling life out there to be lived, and we all deserve that.”

How is Flora’s life now?

[00:02.03] While she may not ever overcome BDD, she won't let it overcome her.

[00:02.49] She's less anxious and enjoys the moment regardless of how she looks.

[00:03.47] She's now 'living in colour'.

When and why did the BDD appear and how did it manifest itself?

[00:05.18] Diet culture and teenage bullying contributed to the problem developing.

[00:06.10] Surgery on Flora's spine in 2014 affected her ability to maintain the body she felt she 'should' have.

[00:08.08] Her safety behaviours included mirror checking, using food and exercise to control her weight and avoiding social events if she felt she didn't look okay.

How did she realise she was suffering from a psychological condition?

[00:04.22] When the COVID-19 lockdown began in the UK, Flora realised she'd been struggling with BDD. But it's hard to know whether it or the eating disorder came first.

[00:14.38] She watched a video of herself exercising and realised her reaction – including her safety behaviours – was excessive.

[00:18.53] Flora never received a formal diagnosis but referred herself for online CBT through the NHS.

What help and treatment did Flora receive?

[00:10.44] She attended Structured Support Groups through the BDD Foundation, which taught her that the way she thinks about her body is the problem.

[00:12.10] She had an eureka moment with the mirror that showed her how much she'd been missing because of her BDD.

[00:21.12] The most useful Structured Support Group modules for Flora were: understanding her BDD; values direction (how she wants to live her life and values herself as a person); refocusing her attention, and self-compassion.

What else did she find helpful?

[00:31.03] Writing a letter to her 13-year-old self was very effective.

[00:36.19] Changing the social media accounts she follows to body positive ones.

[00:33.40] She also created a roadmap of thoughts as the UK opened back up from lockdown. So she was ready to deal with what her BDD might tell her at each stage.

What would Flora say to someone who's struggling with BDD?

[00:39.12] However it may look, there's a life out there for each one of us and we deserve to live it. We aren't defined by our appearances.

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org