

Personality Defects: Everything You Need to Know

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Introduction

Have you ever wondered what kind of person someone is after engaging with them for the first time or getting to know them over time? Everyone is different. This is not news to anyone but in that difference, what is considered normal or abnormal. Firstly, understanding what personality is, is the first step in the right direction. This article will go through what *personality defects* are and how to identify them.

What is Personality?

Personality is “the way of thinking, feeling and behaving that makes a person different from other people. An individual’s personality is influenced by experiences, environment (surroundings, life situations), and inherited characteristics. A person’s personality typically stays the same over time.” (American Psychology Association, 2020). Knowing that there are usually two sides to a story, understanding what a *personality defect* is, will move us to a better understanding of how to recognise them.

What is Personality Disorder?

A *personality defect* or disorder is outlined by the American Psychology Association (2020), as a way of thinking, feeling and behaving that deviates from the expectations of the social environment. This usually leads to distress and functioning problems, lasting over a long time. There are four major areas that personality disorder may affect, usually two of these in one case:

- Way of thinking about oneself and others;
- Way of responding emotionally;
- Way of relating to other people;
- Way of controlling one’s behaviour.

Types of *Personality Defects*

As there are different types of personalities such as introverted or extroverted, there are also different types of *personality defects*. According to Legg (2017), personality disorders are grouped in three main clusters: Group A – Suspicious; Group B – Emotional and Impulsive; Group C – Anxious. Under each cluster, the various personality disorders are mentioned and explained.

Group A – Suspicious

1. **Paranoid personality disorder:** People with paranoid personality disorder are very distrustful of others and suspicious of their motives. They also tend to hold grudges.
2. **Schizoid personality disorder:** People with this type of disorder display little interest in forming personal relationships or partaking in social interactions. They usually don't pick up on normal social cues, so they can seem emotionally cold.
3. **Schizotypal personality disorder:** In schizotypal personality disorder, people believe they can influence other people or events with their thoughts. They often misinterpret behaviours. This causes them to have inappropriate emotional responses. They may consistently avoid having intimate relationships.

Group B – Emotional and Impulsive

1. **Antisocial personality disorder:** People with antisocial personality disorder tend to manipulate or treat others harshly without expressing remorse for their actions. They may lie, steal, or abuse alcohol or drugs.
2. **Borderline personality disorder:** People with this type of disorder often feel empty and abandoned, regardless of family or community support. They may have difficulty dealing with stressful events. They may have episodes of paranoia. They also tend to engage in risky and impulsive behaviour, such as unsafe sex, binge drinking, and gambling.
3. **Histrionic personality disorder:** In histrionic personality disorder, people frequently try to gain more attention by being overly dramatic or sexually provocative. They are easily influenced by other people and are extremely sensitive to criticism or disapproval.
4. **Narcissistic personality disorder:** People with narcissistic personality disorder believe that they are more important than others. They tend to exaggerate their achievements and may brag about their attractiveness or success. They have a deep need for admiration but lack empathy for other people.

Group C – Anxious

1. **Avoidant personality disorder:** People with this type of disorder often experience feelings of inadequacy, inferiority or unattractiveness. They usually dwell on criticism from others and avoid participating in new activities or making new friends.
2. **Dependent personality disorder:** Independent personality disorder, people heavily depend on other people to meet their emotional and physical needs. They usually avoid being alone. They regularly need reassurance when making decisions. They may also be likely to tolerate physical and verbal abuse.
3. **Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder:** People with obsessive-compulsive personality disorder have an overwhelming need for order. They strongly adhere to rules and regulations. They feel extremely uncomfortable when perfection isn't achieved. They may even neglect personal relationships to focus on making a project perfect.

How are Personality Disorders Treated?

As mentioned previously, personality defects have a long life in terms of the effects it may have on an individual but this is if they are not treated. Meaning, personality defects can be treated. How can these be treated and by who? The most commonly used treatment is the use of psychotherapy practice. During psychotherapy treatment, the individual can gain insight and knowledge about the disorder and what is contributing to symptoms and can talk about thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Psychotherapy can help a person understand the effects of their behaviour on others and learn to manage or cope with symptoms and to reduce behaviours causing problems with functioning and relationships. The type of treatment will depend on the specific personality disorder, how severe it is, and the individual's circumstances (American Psychology Association, 2020).

Below are the different types of treatment:

1. **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)** - CBT can help an individual to change how they think and do. These are both linked to feeling. CBT looks at problems and difficulties in the 'here and now' more than the past or childhood. CBT can help in understanding how you think about yourself, the world and other people (Rethinking Mental Illness, 2020).
2. **Dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT)** - DBT can help someone to learn to spot and control emotions and behaviour. It is adapted from CBT. It helps recognising then change unhelpful behaviour by learning new skills. Unhelpful behaviour might include thinking about suicide, self-harming, drinking alcohol or using drugs to cope with your emotions. A course of DBT usually takes place over 18 months (Rethinking Mental Illness, 2020).
3. **Cognitive analytical therapy (CAT)** - CAT helps to recognise relationship patterns that can cause problems and are difficult to change. An individual may have learnt these patterns while growing up to cope with difficult emotions. Them and the therapist will work together to recognise these patterns and then to try and change them. This therapy is based on the individual's needs and takes into account their current situation and the problems they are having. This type of therapy can usually last between 4 – 24 weeks but on average lasts 16 weeks (Rethinking Mental Illness, 2020).
4. **Mentalisation based therapy (MBT)** - Mentalising is about making sense of what other people think, need, or want. It is about being aware of what's going on in one's mind and the minds of others. Mentalising refers to the fact that sometimes when one feels distressed, it can be harder to 'mentalise.' They would attend group and one-to-one therapy. This may help them better understand themselves and others and learn how to mentalise. Treatment programmes can last for 12 to 18 months (Rethinking Mental Illness, 2020).
5. **Psychodynamic or psychoanalytic therapy** - This type of long-term therapy is a therapeutic process which helps patients understand and resolve their problems. It does this by increasing awareness of their inner world and its influence over relationships both past and present. It differs from most other therapies in aiming for a deep-seated change in personality and emotional development. It helps people to understand and change complex, deep-seated emotional and relationship problems (Rethinking Mental Illness, 2020).
6. **Therapeutic communities** - A therapeutic community is a place one would get long-term group therapy. They would visit or sometimes stay, for some weeks or months. Sometimes one may visit for just a few days a week. They learn from spending time with other people in the treatment group. It offers a safe place if there are any disagreements or upsets. People in a

therapeutic community often have a lot of say over how the community runs (Rethinking Mental Illness, 2020).

Unfortunately, there is no medication to cure personality disorders however according to Rethinking Mental Illness (2020), medication such as antidepressants, anti-anxiety medication or mood stabilising medication, may help treat some symptoms there is some medication that people do take to cope with the effects.

Self-Care for People with Personality Disorders

Lastly, there are some things that one can do to cope with the effects of *personality defects*. These are:

1. Learn about the condition.
2. Get active. Physical activity and exercise can help manage many symptoms, such as depression, stress and anxiety.
3. Avoid drugs and alcohol as they can worsen symptoms or interact with medications.
4. Get routine medical care. Don't neglect check-ups or regular care from your family doctor.
5. Join a support group of others with *personality disorders*.
6. Write in a journal to express your emotions.
7. Try relaxation and stress management techniques such as yoga and meditation.
8. Stay connected with family and friends; avoid becoming isolated.

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