The Difficult Personality: Ours, Those We Supervise, Patients & Families

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1. “When you are mad, mad like this, you don't know it. Reality is what you see.” Marya Hornbacher, “Madness, A Bipolar Life”

For more information about Bipolar Disorder go to the National Institute of Mental health at: https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder/index.shtml

2. “To stave off the panic associated with the absence of a primary object, borderline patients frequently will impulsively engage in behaviors that numb the panic and establish contact with and control over some new object.”

Christine Ann Lawson, “Understanding the Borderline Mother: Helping Her Children Transcend the Intense, Unpredictable, and Volatile Relationship”

And, from the National Institute of Mental health, here is some information about Borderline Personality Disorder: https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/borderline-personality-disorder/index.shtml

3. Ruminating is the name I have given to the propensity of BPs to have “worry thoughts” about events and to turn them over-and-over in their mind. These events are usually in the past, although sometimes they can be about the possibility of future events linked with past events. Ruminating is an extended form of worry and anxiety in which the sufferer will examine events with an eye to find malignant intentions of others or judgments of themselves. Ruminating can lead to paranoia regarding the intentions of others. Bon Dobbs, Mental Health Professional, The Difficult Personality

4. Magic Wand

The only thing you have to offer anyone is the work you have done on yourself…up to this point. Marianne Williamson

5. Self-Assessment Exercise Is it you?

(See exercise towards the end of this handout)

6. Personality….

Personality refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. Encyclopedia of Psychology

While we can't simply slap a personality read on anyone, there are five key qualities—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—psychologists refer to as the “Big Five” traits that are useful when talking about personality. The key is that these traits aren't fixed in any given person. Psychologist Brian Little
7. Working with challenging personalities – initial thoughts:

- Stay grounded and do not climb into the “drama”
- Establish ground rules, expectations and boundaries early and quickly
- Reinforce them consistently - don’t budge no matter how tempted you may be
- If it does not belong to you, don’t pick it up
- Anticipate and watch for “cross-contamination”

Maybe one of the most difficult things to do when we are confronted with a difficult personality is to stay centered and grounded. For many of us our tendency is to get defensive or we want to retreat…neither are great options – at least in a professional setting. Check out the article: 20 Expert Tactics for Dealing with Difficult People by Barbara Markway, Ph.D. at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-the-questions/201503/20-expert-tactics-dealing-difficult-people

8. What is it you want to address?

- Specific personality features
- Plain ole’ inappropriate behavior
- Education/skill deficit
- Group think
- Other?

When we have a clear idea about what we want to address it is easier to decide what approach and/or interventions are best. Is this a personality problem or is this person being difficult because they have gotten “revved up” by gossip and misinformation? (groupthink) For some good information about the “groupthink” dynamic, go to: http://www.psyr.org/about/pubs_resources/groupthink%20overview.htm

9. Disorder, versus “features” versus…something else

Caution:

- This is not about diagnosing!!
- We all have features of various personality types
- As we just said…it may be something else

Here is a great article to assist in understanding diagnosis versus traits: Do you have a Disorder – Or Just a Trait by David Rettew, MD: https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/abcs-child-psychiatry/201309/do-you-have-disorder-or-just-trait

10. It is in part about how we view the world in which we live - and then - how we go about solving problems based on that thinking

11. The Effective Problem Solving Process - Critical thinking
   - The problem is identified operationally
   - Possible actions are considered
   - The goal is to find solutions to the problem
   - Solutions are tried/tested
   - Outcomes are evaluated
   
   As you can see, the focus here is on “solving the problem” whether we do it well or not, and/or whether we are successful or not…that is the goal.

12. Ineffective Problem Solving Related to Personality
   - The problem is defined personally
   - Solutions are to preserve identity
   - This behavior distracts from, rather than assists in, finding helpful solutions to the problem
   - Excessive complications are common
   
   In this situation, the goal is not to solve the problem but instead, defend the identity. That then leads to a great big mess…usually.

13. Karpman Drama Triangle

   ![Karpman Drama Triangle Diagram]

   Here is a link to the official site about Karpman Drama Tringle for much more information: https://www.karpmandramatriangle.com/

14. Purpose: Survival of the identity rather than create a positive resolution
   - Rescuer: “I will save you” (savior) (special)
   - Persecutor: “I am right” (powerful) (controlling)
   - Victim: “I am blameless because I am wounded” (safe)

15. When we go to the victim place we give away our power…
   - “People here don’t value good patient care.”
   - “I am often not included in important conversations.”
• “No one ever listens to me.”
• “People don’t value or respect me.”

*Here is an interesting article about “the victim mentality” in the workplace in general... see what you think: http://www.the2percentfactor.com/blog/bid/244296/ELIMINATING-THE-VICTIM-MENTALITY-IMPROVING-WORKPLACE-CULTURE

16. The “I Love You I Hate You” Personality: Glenn Close “Fatal Attraction”
• Tendency to be unpredictable
• Rapidly changing moods
• Anger may be inappropriate
• Sometimes great sometimes terrible
• Sometimes lacking rational justification for behavior and/or moods
• Fear of abandonment or the perception of...
• Moves between being the rescuer, victim and then persecutor

17. Responses
• Resist rescuing but show compassion
• Do not “climb in to” the drama
• Set clear and consistent boundaries – in writing as necessary
• Expect drama and stay grounded
• Avoid being provoked into arguments or defense

*For more information about Borderline Personality Disorder, see: Borderline Personality Disorder - A Guide to Spotting the Signs of Borderline Personality Disorder – BPD, by Arnold Lieber, MD: https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.borderline.html

18. Case Example: Judith

Judith is someone you supervise. You have become good friends and sometimes socialize outside of work. She says that over the past several months you have become her only friend and that she “loves” you very much. You are aware that she doesn’t have a lot of friends. At work people say that she is the best employee we have in part because she often becomes irate when things don’t go the way employees want and management often gives in because of her outbursts. People also think she is good with patients/families because she is always able to get them to do what she wants.

One day she asks you to go to lunch and you inform her that you cannot because you have work to do. She responds by saying “I know you don’t really like me. Is it because of what others are saying about me?”

How might you respond? How will you “manage” the situation?

*A really good video about Borderline Personality Disorder and various types: “Back From the Edge” - Borderline Personality Disorder: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=967Ckat7f98*
   - A feeling of personal importance
   - Sometimes unrealistic beliefs about personal success and opportunities
   - Believes they and their problems are unique/special and require special people to understand them
   - Tend to lack empathy and can be seen as arrogant
   For more detailed information about Narcissistic Personality Disorder, see Narcissistic Traits at BPD Central: https://www.bpdcentral.com/narcissistic-disorder/hallmarks-of-npd/

20. Responses
   - Stay grounded and show a respectful detachment towards boasting/need to impress
   - Do not engage in arguments or defense
   - Use open-ended questions
   - Give them the opportunity to teach you about what they know...when appropriate
   Here is a really good article called: Communicating with Narcissistic Personalities by Steve Becker, LCSW, CHT:

21. Case Example: Mark

   Mark is a 60 year-old man whose wife is ill. He says he knows what is best for his wife and wants everyone to check with him first before they do anything for her. The team sees him as uncaring, arrogant, demeaning and distant from his wife. His wife consistently says “I don’t know what I want, ask my husband.”

22. The Passive/Aggressive Personality: Robert De Niro “Meet the Parents”
   - Generally negative
   - Passive resistance to authority (focus of discontent)
   - Resentment and resistance against “normal” expectations
   - Resistance may appear as: procrastination, forgetfulness, stubbornness, and intentional inefficiency
   - Blame is common
   - May feel cheated, unappreciated and misunderstood
   For more information about this personality, see the article: The Negativistic Passive Aggressive Personality at: http://www.alpfmedical.info/personality-disorders-2/the-negativistic-passiveaggressive-personality.html

23. Responses
   - Make sure agreements are very clear
• Ask person to repeat back what they have heard
• Put agreements in writing when possible
• Be prepared with facts prior to discussions
• Be prepared to be taken off guard by well thought out defenses
• Be prepared for personal attacks

24. Case Example: Mike

Mike is someone you supervise. He is very bright and does some exceptional work. When he is with you one-to-one he is very positive and agreeable. The problem is that you often hear from others that he spreads rumors, tells others things about you and the organization that are not true and he regularly misses deadlines you give him. When you confront him about the gossip he responds by saying “It is their word against mine. I would never do that. I told you how I feel about things in our last meeting. And, by the way, I overheard you gossiping the other day.”

What to do about Mike???

While the Passive-Aggressive Negativistic Personality Disorder is a little different than just passive-aggressive communications styles this article can still be useful - 6 Tips for Dealing With Passive-Aggressive People - There are ways to get along without sacrificing your emotional wellness: https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/communication-success/201501/6-tips-dealing-passive-aggressive-people

25. Caution!
• Why “normal” interventions don’t work
• Scope of practice restrictions
• Consent to treat restrictions
• Documentation land mines

26. About Mindfulness

A focus on becoming aware of all incoming thoughts and feelings and accepting them, but not attaching or reacting to them.


If you are interested in the research, check out Effects of Mindfulness Training on Different Components of Impulsivity in Borderline Personality Disorder: results from a pilot randomized study: https://bpded.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40479-015-0035-8

To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world so use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others. Anthony Robbins
Working with Difficult People
Self-Assessment Exercise

Please take a minute to read through the following statements. What would be your most candid response?

1. I feel confident working with different types of people.

2. I rarely feel taken “off guard” by others.

3. I treat all patients and families equally.

4. I treat every person I supervise equally.

5. I am clear about the most effective method of communication for various types of personalities.

6. I am able to remain grounded and centered when confronted with a personality many would find “difficult”.

7. I understand passive-aggressive communication and I am clear how best to intervene and respond.

8. I understand manipulative behavior how to redirect it.

9. I am clear about my professional and personal boundaries in my role and I maintain them consistently.

10. I am least comfortable with _________ type people.
The Compulsive Personality  
From Reasonable to Irrational

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<th>Reasonable</th>
<th>Be Careful</th>
<th>Wrong Turn</th>
<th>Get help!</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionist</td>
<td>“I take pride in what I do.”</td>
<td>“I feel I have to work on things until I get them right.”</td>
<td>“I can’t stop working until it is perfect. Even if it is satisfactory.”</td>
<td>“I never finish anything because nothing is ever good enough.”</td>
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<td>“I have little time for leisure or family.”</td>
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<td>“I can’t leave work if something is unfinished. I don’t have time for vacations.”</td>
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<td>“I am extremely stressed if I leave work with something undone. Sometimes I sleep there.”</td>
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<td>Hard Worker</td>
<td>“I believe in working hard.”</td>
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<td>The Planner</td>
<td>“I like to consider my choices before I act.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I have to explore all alternatives before I act.”</td>
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<td>“Risk management requires that I explore all possible outcomes. I often have problems making a decision.”</td>
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<td>“I get so lost in the ‘what ifs’ that I never commit to anything.”</td>
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<td>The Moral Perspective</td>
<td>“I like to do the right thing.”</td>
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<td>“I am sometimes intolerant of people whose standards are lower than mine.”</td>
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<td>“I am disgusted by the behavior of many of the people around me.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I think anyone who misbehaves here should be immediately punished.”</td>
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<td>Emotionally Suppressed</td>
<td>“Not much gets me excited.”</td>
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<td>“I don’t believe in showing emotion at work.”</td>
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<td>“I don’t really enjoy much at all and certainly not at work.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I have never found any professional enjoyment.”</td>
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Personality Disorders – Summary

Cluster A: Odd or eccentric behavior
• Schizoid Personality Disorder
• Paranoid Personality Disorder
• Schizotypal Personality Disorder

Cluster B: Dramatic, emotional or erratic behavior
• Antisocial Personality Disorder
• Borderline Personality Disorder
• Narcissistic Personality Disorder
• Histrionic Personality Disorder

Cluster C: Anxious, fearful behavior
• Avoidant Personality Disorder
• Dependent Personality Disorder
• Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder

Paranoid: Suspicious – distrusting
They view the world as dangerous and people in it as out to get them
The enemy is most people

Schizoid: Detached
They view the world as uninteresting and themselves as self-sufficient (no need for others – they most always live alone)
Enemy: People or things that “violate their space”

Schizotypal: Eccentric
They view the world as fascinating and themselves as gifted – tend to live in a fantasy world where they believe their fantasies are real
Enemy: This personality is less about their fears…but people tend to fear them because of their bizarre ideas and behavior and that tends to produce distance and isolation.

Antisocial: a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others
They view the world as “dog-eat-dog” and themselves as superior.
Enemy: the feeling of being out of control

Borderline: High drama – intense changeability
They view the world as rejecting and themselves as vulnerable
Enemy: abandonment (real or perceived)

Histrionic: Highly expressive, emotional, attention seeking
They view the world as impressionistic and themselves as enticing/appealing
Enemy: feeling invisible not being noticed
**Narcissistic:** Self-centered and grandiose
They view the world as belonging to them (theirs to control) and they view themselves as special
Enemy: shame or anything that feels shameful to them – they respond with aggression

**Avoidant:** Timid feel inadequate
They view the world as scary and themselves as inferior
Enemy: Criticism (real or perceived) they respond with retreat

**Dependent:** Submissive – clinging
They view the world as overwhelming and themselves as uncertain/confused...in desperate need of others
Enemy: the feeling that they are alone and have to make their own decisions

**Obsessive-Compulsive:** Rigid and need things to be orderly (based on their definition) “lined up”
They view the world as contaminated and themselves as “knowing the right way”
Enemy: feeling out of control or things (generally certain things) being out of the order this person feels they need to be in
In addition to the references provided in the handout above, here are some additional references and resources.


And…

*Emotional Vampires: Dealing with People Who Drain You Dry*  


*Personality Disorders: Crash Course Psychology #34*  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E1JiDFxFGk


*Personality Disorders in Modern Life by* Theodore Millon and Roger Davis. 2004 Wiley editors.