

BPD: Communication Tools for Loved Ones

This is a tool designed for families and partners to read together with the individual diagnosed with BPD. Highlight and discuss what you feel would be helpful to you both and what you might see as discounting or placating. This needs to be discussed with transparency in order for it to be beneficial when there is an argument, misunderstanding, or feelings of unworthiness. Take note: This same tool is beneficial to any couple in any situation.

These suggestions are designed to help maintain boundaries while being supportive, manage crises responsibly, and communicate effectively without exacerbating the situation. Using these approaches can help foster a healthier environment for both individuals and can be particularly useful in managing the challenges that come with BPD.

Understanding and Validation

Express Understanding Without Judgment:

"I see that you're really upset right now, and that's okay. I'm here with you."

"It sounds like you're feeling really overwhelmed. Let's talk about what's going on."

Validate Their Feelings:

"Your feelings are important to me, even if I don't fully understand them all the time. Let's work through this together."

"It makes sense that you'd feel this way given what you've been through."

Consistent and Reassuring Presence

Offer Assurance:

"I'm not going anywhere. We'll get through this together."

"You're not alone in this. I'm here for you whenever you need me."

Promote a Sense of Safety:

"I want to create a safe space for you to express your feelings. You can tell me anything."

Encourage Open Communication

Foster Honest Dialogue:

"It helps me when you tell me what you need. Can you share with me what you're needing right now?"

"I want to understand you better. Can you help me by explaining your feelings a bit more?"

Supportive Actions

Suggest Collaborative Problem-Solving:

"Let's figure out what we can do together to make this situation better for you."

"What's one thing we can work on together right now that might help you feel better?"

Promote Self-Care and Healthy Boundaries:

"It's okay to take some time for yourself if you need it. How about we both do something relaxing?"

"Let's both think about what boundaries we can set to keep our relationship healthy. What boundaries would help you feel supported?"

De-Escalation Techniques

Calm and Measured Responses:

"I understand things feel intense right now. Let's take a few deep breaths together."

"I see this is really hard for you. Let's pause for a moment until we feel a bit calmer to discuss."

Encouraging Professional Help

Gentle Encouragement for Therapy:

"I think it would be beneficial for us to seek some guidance from someone who can help us navigate these challenges. I would be supportive of us going to therapy together or you finding someone you can talk to individually."

These approaches focus on maintaining open communication, providing emotional support, and fostering understanding. Family members and spouses can significantly impact the emotional stability and overall wellbeing of individuals with BPD by using empathetic and validating communication techniques.

Communicating About Taking Breaks

Taking a Short Break: State where you are going and when you will return and stick to it.

"I need to take a 30-minute break to clear my head. I'll be back, I am going to take a walk in the neighborhood and we can continue this conversation then."

"I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed, so I'm going to take a short break. I am going to take a bath and listen to a book. Let's pause and I'll come back in 30 minutes so we can talk more calmly."

Setting Boundaries on Unacceptable Behavior

Setting Limits During Conflict:

"It's not okay for us to speak to each other this way. I'm going to step away for a bit, and I'll return when we're both a bit calmer."

"I care about our conversation, but the way it's going right now isn't productive. I'll take a break and come back in a little while so we can try again."

Responding to Threats of Self-Harm

Addressing Self-Harm Threats:

"I hear that you're in a lot of pain and thinking about hurting yourself. It's important to me that you're safe. Let's call your therapist or a helpline together."

"I'm really concerned about what you just said about harming yourself. Let's find someone who can help right now."

"I am calling 911 unless you can de-escalate now."

Avoiding Feeding into Drama

Maintaining Composure and Perspective:

"Let's focus on what we can do right now instead of getting caught up in things that upset us. How can we move forward positively?"

"I want to help you, but I also need to stay calm. Let's try to address one thing at a time without escalating our emotions."

"I won't continue to stand here and listen to irrational thoughts, so I am going to go take a walk and we can continue to talk in 20 minutes."

"I won't allow myself to stand here and listen to your comments regarding what I am going wrong. I am happy to discuss what we are both doing wrong but not with the yelling, threatening, and accusatory comments."

Encouraging Constructive Dialogue:

"It seems like things are getting heated. Let's try to slow down and talk about one specific thing you're upset about right now."

"Let's try to keep this conversation constructive. What's the main thing you'd like me to understand?"

"I don't like myself when I get this mad, I am going to take a few minutes and calm down and we can continue this conversation when we are both calm."

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Responding to Threats of Leaving or Self-Doubt

When Threatened with Leaving:

"I hear that you're feeling like leaving might be an option for you right now. Can we talk about what's leading you to feel this way?"

"It sounds like you're really upset and considering leaving. Let's discuss what we both need from this relationship to make it work."

Addressing Feelings of Inadequacy:

"You are important to me, and I believe you deserve to be happy and feel valued. Let's talk about these feelings and see what we can do to improve things."

"I know you might not feel like it right now, but you are enough for me. What can I do to help you see the value I see in you?"

"You are who I have chosen to be with. I love you and am here for you. I want to help you feel more secure with our relationship so tell what you feel you need that I am not offering you."

Responding to Victim Mentality:

"I understand you feel hurt, and I want to address that without escalating our emotions. Can we look at what specifically is making you feel this way?"

"It seems like you feel very wronged. Let's discuss what happened and find a way to move forward together."

"I understand you are being played or manipulated by your boss, tell me more about what happened, I am here to listen."

When Asked to Leave:

"If you need space right now, I'll respect that and give you time to yourself. Let me know when you're ready to talk."

"I'm here to support you, but I'll step away since you need some time alone. Just remember, I'm ready to talk whenever you feel better."

Communicating Personal Boundaries:

"I want to support you, but I also need to ensure we are both being respected in this discussion. Let's try to communicate in a way that is healthy for both of us."

"It's important for both of us to feel safe and heard in this conversation. I need to take a moment to ensure we can continue respectfully."

Handling Self-Harm and Threats of Leaving

When They Are Physically Hurting Themselves or Threatening Self-Harm:

"I see you're in a lot of pain right now. Let's call someone who can help, like your therapist or a helpline. It's important to keep you safe."

"Your safety is my top priority. Let's find you some help right away. We can work through other issues once we know you're safe."

Threatening to Leave or End the Relationship:

"I understand you're feeling like you might need to leave. Can we discuss what's making you feel this way to see if there's another way to address it?"

"Talk to me about why you feel ending things might be the solution. Maybe there's something we can do together to work through this."

"I hear what you are saying and I want to make myself clear to you that I love you and don't want you to leave so let's talk about how you are feeling and what I have done to make you want to leave."

Responding to Accusations and Mistrust

Accusing of Affairs, Lack of Trust:

"I hear that you're feeling unsure about my loyalty. I want to reassure you that I'm committed to you. What can I do to help rebuild your trust?"

"It hurts to hear those suspicions, but I understand where they might be coming from. Let's talk about why you feel this way and what I can do to assure you."

"I am open to discuss why you are feeling like I am not telling you something, it is not my intention to hide anything from you."

Accusing You of Not Loving Them or Planning to Leave:

"I'm here with you, and I'm not planning to leave. I love you and we can work through these feelings together."

"It sounds like you're really scared I might leave. I want to affirm that I'm committed to our relationship and to supporting you."

"I would like to hear what I am doing to make you feel I am going to leave."

Accusing You of Being Mean, Hateful, or Disconnected:

"I'm sorry you feel that way. I want to understand why you feel disconnected from me and address it together."

"You are absolutely right; I have been feeling disconnected and I want to talk about it."

"I have been short with you lately and I apologize for this, it is not fair to you, I have been wrong to not share what's going on with me at work. I would love to talk about it."

"Let's take a step back and talk about what's been going on. I want us to connect and understand each other better."

Accusing You of a Mood Change or Hiding Something:

"I can see why you might think something's up. Let me share what's been going on with me lately so you can understand better."

"I want to be open with you about everything. Let's discuss what's making you feel uneasy."

"My behaviors have been different lately, I have had a lot on my mind lately and would love to talk to you about my feelings."

Addressing Repetitive Questioning and Bullying

When They Ask the Same Question Repeatedly:

"I know you're looking for reassurance. I've answered as best I can, but it seems like you're still feeling unsure. How can we address this together?"

"It sounds like you're still worried about this. Let's see if there's another way to talk about it that might help you feel more settled."

When You Feel Bullied:

"It's important for both of us to feel respected. When you say things like that, it makes it hard for me to engage. Let's try to keep our conversation constructive."

"I want to support you, but I also need to be treated with respect. Let's find a way to talk that works for both of us."

Handling Blame and Repeated Arguments

Responding When Blamed for an Argument or Disagreement:

"I can see you're upset by how things went. Let's try to understand each other's points of view and work through this together."

"It sounds like you're really hurt by what happened. Can we discuss what each of us could do differently next time?"

When Recognizing an Attempt to Start a Repeated Argument:

"I feel like we're starting to revisit an issue we've discussed before. What can we do differently this time to find a resolution?"

"Let's try to approach this differently than last time. What can I do right now to help us move forward?"

Managing Intimidation and Overpowering Behavior

Responding to Overpowering Body Language or Voice:

"I want to continue this conversation, but it's important that we both feel comfortable. Can we adjust how we're speaking to make sure we're both heard?"

"It seems things are getting intense. Could we both take a step back and ensure we're communicating in a way that feels respectful?"

When Intimidated by Body Language:

"Your body language makes me feel a bit overwhelmed. Can we sit down and make sure we're both feeling secure as we talk?"

Addressing Provocative Communication

"This message seems to carry a lot of emotion. It might be better if we discuss this in person or when we're both calm."

"I want to understand your feelings, but these long messages make it hard. Can we simplify our communication to help each other better?"

Responding to Negative Comments About You, Your Family, Friends, or Work:

"It's important to me that we respect each other's relationships and professions. If you have concerns, can we discuss them constructively?"

"When you say things like that, it makes it difficult to maintain a positive conversation. Let's focus on speaking positively about each other's lives."

"I know I can be negative too, and I don't like myself when I do. Let's stop being so negative and talk more constructively."

Engaging Constructively with Someone with BPD:

"I value our relationship and want to understand your perspective. Let's share openly in a way that builds us both up."

"Can you help me understand more about what you're feeling right now? I want to listen and understand your needs."

Allowing Time for De-escalation:

"It seems like emotions are high right now. Maybe a short break would help us both. We can continue talking in a little while after some time to think."

"Let's pause for a moment. When things feel less heated, it might be easier to sort through our thoughts."

"Wow, I am doing it again. Let's stop the tit for tat because we both know where this is going."

Avoiding Tit-for-Tat Responses:

"Let's try not to keep score. Focusing on each issue as it comes might help us find solutions rather than escalating."

"I understand it's tempting to respond in kind when we're upset, but let's try to keep this constructive. What's the main issue we should address now?"

Engaging Constructively with Someone with BPD:

"I value our relationship and want to understand your perspective. Let's share openly in a way that builds us both up."

"Can you help me understand more about what you're feeling right now? I want to listen and understand your needs."

Partner Questions

Questions to Self: Partners play a role in the dysfunction. Asking the following questions to yourself assists you in identifying your part and becoming accountable for your own actions:

Reflective self-questioning can be a powerful tool in any relationship, particularly when navigating the complexities of interactions with someone who may have Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Here's a comprehensive list of questions to ask yourself that can help foster self-awareness, personal accountability, and effective communication:

Self-Reflection and Accountability

Understanding Your Role: "What part did I play in this situation?"

Personal Accountability: "What actions do I need to hold myself accountable for?"

Emotional Check-In: "How do I feel right now?"

Decision Making: "Do I want to stay in this relationship or go, and why?"

Conflict Handling: "How do I typically handle arguments or blow-ups?"

Change for Improvement: "What do I need to change in my approach to conflicts?"

Self-Awareness in Interaction

Examining Passive-Aggressiveness: "Am I being passive-aggressive towards them?"

Reflecting on Punitive Actions: "Am I trying to punish them for something?"

Space and Communication: "Do I just need some space and am scared to tell them?"

Need for Solitude: "Do I need alone time or 'me time'?"

Self-Care Needs: "What do I need right now that I can give myself?"

Blame and Responsibility: "What am I blaming them for?"

Relationship Dynamics

Feeling of Suffocation: "Do I feel suffocated in this relationship?"

Control and Independence: "Do I feel controlled, and how is that affecting me?"

Expressing Feelings: "How can I express these feelings to them constructively?"

Repetitive Behaviors: "What behaviors am I repeating that are not working?"

Manipulative Dynamics: "Am I trying to play a game here?"

Clarifying Desires: "What exactly do I want from this relationship?"

Deeper Insights and Intentions

Identifying Needs and Emotions: "Why am I feeling this way, and what triggered it?"

Ownership in Conflicts: "What do I need to own regarding this altercation?"

Understanding Intentions: "What intentions do I have moving forward?"

Agenda and Outcomes: "What is my agenda in this situation?"

Awareness of Triggers: "Did I trigger them knowingly, understanding it might set them off?"

Consequences of Actions: "What have my actions created in the past?"

Emotional Impact and Resentments

Impact on Partner: "How have I made them feel unwanted or not loved?"

Resentment Reflection: "What am I resenting about them or our relationship?"

Holding On: "What am I holding on to that I might need to let go of?"

These questions are designed to encourage deep introspection and promote healthier, more honest, and supportive interactions. By engaging in this type of self-assessment, you can better understand your motivations, improve your relational dynamics, and enhance overall communication within your relationships.