



# Personality Disorders

Personality disorders are associated with patterns of thinking and feeling about oneself and others, such that they significantly and adversely affect how an individual functions in many aspects of life stably over time. Without treatment, personality disorders can be long-lasting and cause relationship problems, impairments in work or school, and can lead to social isolation or alcohol and drug abuse.



# What is Personality?



Personality is the enduring way of thinking, feeling and behaving of an individual. It shows the way how he/she views and relates to the world. Personality remains, more or less, the same over time and across situations. Researchers describe various aspects of personality as personality traits, such as optimistic, extraverted, agreeable, flexible and neurotic.

## What are Personality Disorders?

Personality disorders are maladaptive ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that are persistently and significantly dysfunctional. People with personality disorders have enduring, inflexible and maladaptive patterns or traits that can affect their thinking, emotional responses, interpersonal relationships and impulse control. The patterns of behavior begin by late adolescence or early adulthood and cause psychological distress and impairments in social and occupational functioning. Diagnosis of a personality disorder requires a mental health professional looking at long-term patterns of functioning and symptoms. Diagnosis is typically made in individuals of 18-year-old or older.

The prevalence rate of personality disorder varies across different research studies. The best estimation indicates that 10% to 13% of people would meet diagnostic criteria for a personality disorder. There is a tendency that people may meet criteria for more than one personality disorder, either at the same time or through the course of development.



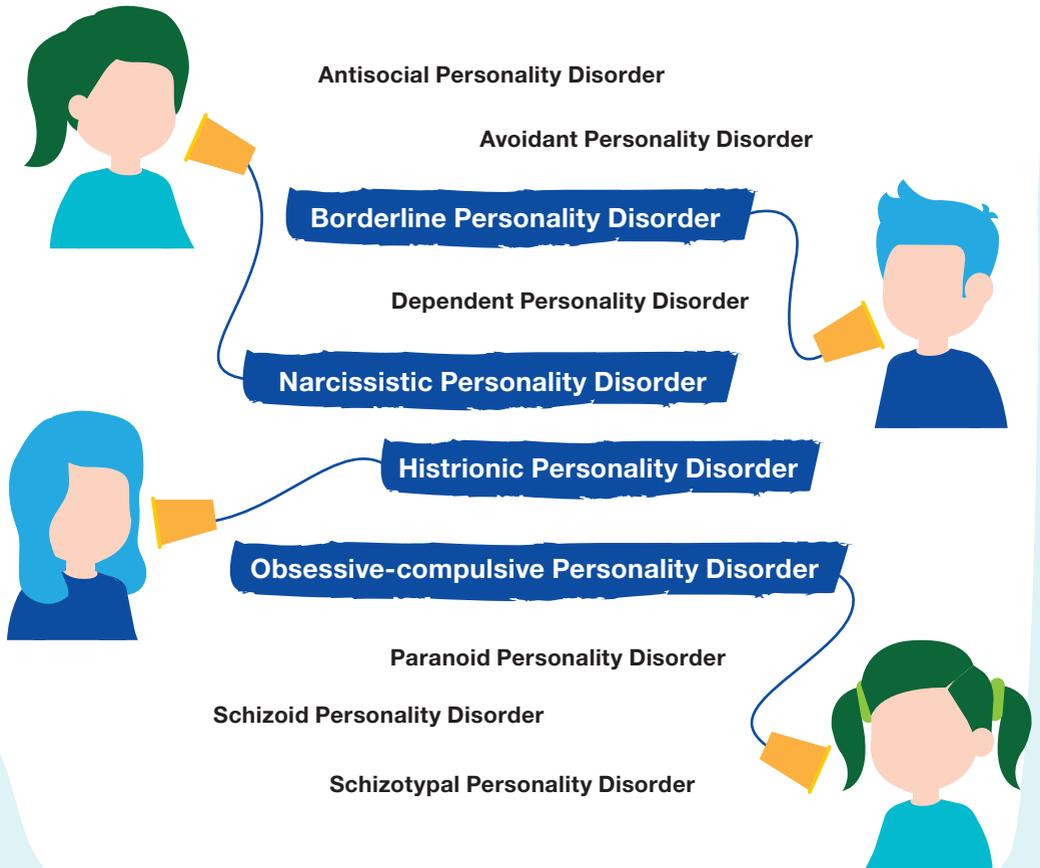
# What Causes Personality Disorders?



The personality of an individual is influenced by experiences, environment and inherited characteristics. However, the causes of personality disorders are not clear. It appears that the following risk factors may increase the development or trigger personality disorders:

- Family history of personality disorders or other mental illness
- Abusive, unstable or chaotic family life during childhood
- Being diagnosed with childhood conduct disorder
- Variations in brain chemistry and structure

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), there are ten types of personality disorders. We are here to highlight four of them which are not uncommon among college students.





## Borderline Personality Disorder

People with borderline personality disorder display a pattern of instability in personal relationships, poor self-image, intense emotions and mood fluctuation. They may go to great lengths to avoid being abandoned, have repeated self-harm and suicide attempts, display inappropriate intense anger, impulsive on the spur of the moment, or have ongoing feelings of emptiness.

## Histrionic Personality Disorder

People with histrionic personality disorder display a long history of drawing attention to themselves and of reacting to insignificant events with dramatic emotions. They may feel uncomfortable when they are not the center of attention, and may use physical appearance to seek admiration to themselves or have rapidly shifting or exaggerated emotions. Once they form relationships, they become demanding, inconsiderate, egocentric and self-absorbed.

## Narcissistic Personality Disorder

People with narcissistic personality disorder display a pattern of need for admiration and lack of empathy for others. They may have an inflated sense of self-importance, a sense of grandiosity and entitlement, use a less stringent standard for evaluating themselves than for judging others, and taking advantage of others. The hidden roots of narcissism may also involve fragile self-esteem and a deep-seated fear of failure.

## Obsessive-compulsive Personality Disorder

People with obsessive-compulsive personality disorder display a pattern of preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism interfering with task completion, as well as mental and interpersonal control. They may be overly focused on details or schedules, may work excessively without allowing time for leisure or friends, or may be inflexible in their morality and values (This is **NOT** the same as obsessive-compulsive disorder.)

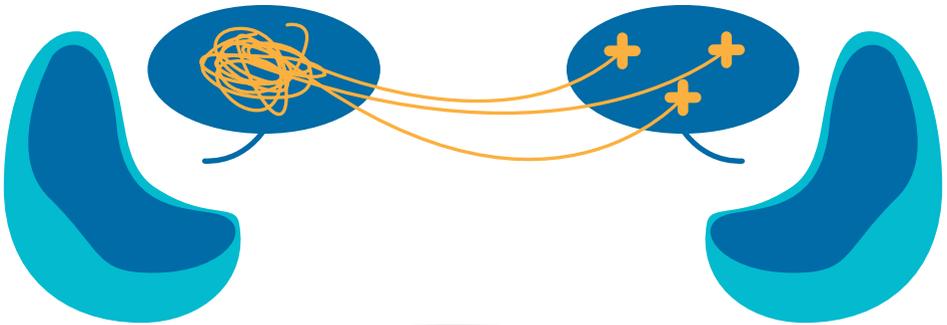


# Is Personality Disorder Treatable?

Many people with personality disorder can live a normal and fulfilling life. The treatment types will depend on the specific personality disorder, the severity and the individual's circumstances.

**Psychotherapy** can help a person gain awareness and knowledge about the disorder, the risk factors, and can talk about thoughts, feelings and behaviors. He/She will understand the effects of their behaviors on others, learn to manage or cope with symptoms and to reduce behaviors causing long-standing problems.

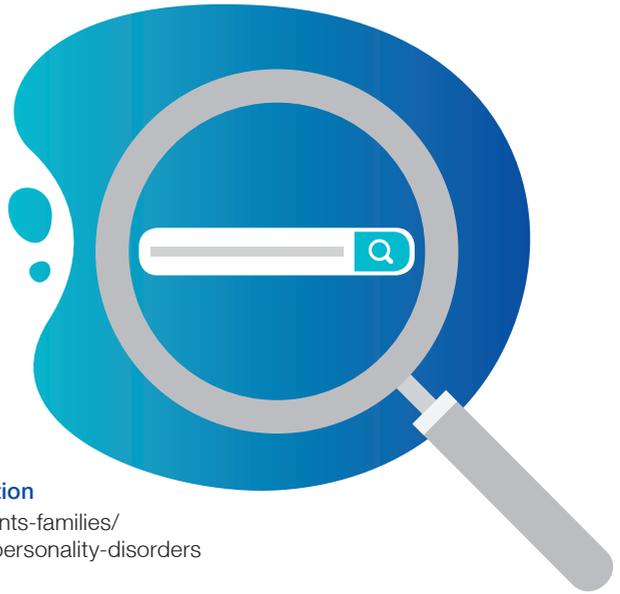
There are no medications specifically to reduce the symptoms or to treat personality disorders. However, some medication, including anti-depressants, anti-anxiety medication or mood-stabilizing medication, may be helpful in relieving and treating some symptoms. Collaboration among professionals, including primary care doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurse and social worker, is necessary to render support to more severe or prolonged symptoms.



## Support and Self-help



Personality disorders can significantly interfere with and disrupt the lives of the affected person and those who care about that person. Day-to-day living with a person with personality disorder can be very difficult and stressful. In addition to seeking professional treatment proactively, family support is crucial for the person's recovery. Self-care and coping strategies are important to empower and motivate oneself to improve the psychological health condition. For instance, it is helpful to maintain regular physical exercises, avoid drug and alcohol, join self-help support groups, learn to relax and manage stress, as well as stay connected by taking up interests or hobbies.



## References

### American Psychiatric Association

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/personality-disorders/what-are-personality-disorders>

### Mayo Clinic, Personality Disorders

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/personality-disorders/symptoms-causes/syc-20354463>

### Royal College of Psychiatrists

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/personality-disorder>

Seligman, M. E. P, Walker, E. F., Rosenhau, D. L. (2002). *Abnormal psychology* (4th Ed.). New York: Norton & Company.

## Professional Help-seeking

The University provides counseling services for undergraduate and postgraduate students. You may check out Counselors' profiles on our webpage and make an online appointment with us. Three weeks' advance reservation is allowed. All personal information and details shared and discussed in counseling or therapy sessions are strictly confidential.

### Counseling and Wellness Center

🏠 Room 5003 (via lift 3) ☎ (852) 2358 6696  
🌐 <http://counsel.ust.hk> ✉ [counsel@ust.hk](mailto:counsel@ust.hk)

**24/7 HEARing** ☎ (852) 8208 2688

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