STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND DECREASING CONFLICT

BPD Patient and Family Education Webinar

Karen Adler MD,
McLean Gunderson Outpatient Program and Borderline Personality Disorder Training Institute
Harvard Medical School

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Common Communication Complaints

- My parents constantly criticize me
- I can’t say anything without it setting her off, no matter what I do it’s wrong
- No one can really stand being around me for too long, even my own family
- We’re close if there’s no boyfriend in the picture, but once there’s a guy, she disappears until she needs me for something
- My parents really stress me out and overwhelm me with everything, it’s too much
- She never takes responsibility, I can’t even have a conversation about when she’s going to start paying for some of her expenses
What goes wrong?

Person with BPD

- Relationships very important but attachments are insecure
- Sensitivity to feeling misunderstood, criticized, rejected, disliked
- Assumptions about other’s being able to mind read and knowing the other’s mind
- Hypersensitivity to other’s emotion – can be misperception, amplification of real emotion, or misattribution to being about them
- Tendency to get angry and/or self-punishing when feeling hurt or threatened
- Once strong emotion is triggered, can’t think straight
What goes wrong?

Well Meaning Loved One

• Reacting to content rather than underlying emotion (eg debating the facts)
• Trying to use logic when person w BPD is in throws of emotion
• Not acknowledging what is true or valid
• Not understanding that what is said in one mood state does not carry over to a different mood state
• Avoiding/conceal information due to fear of negative reaction
• Unintentionally reinforcing outbursts (eg giving in to make the conflict stop)
Borderline Personality Disorder

Internalizing

- Interpersonal Hypersensitivity

Externalizing

- Self-Harm
- Impulsivity
- Cognitive Disturbance
- Emotional Dysregulation

Gunderson, 2011
Gunderson’s Model of BPD

Interpersonal stress
Withdrawal by the other
Lack of holding

Support by the other
Holding environment

Idealizing, dependent
Threatened
Self-injury, angry

Aloneness
Paranoid, impulsive
Despair
Suicidal
What’s going in the brain during conflict/outbursts?
Disrupted attachment

I am her biggest supporter, so why am I always the target?

- Closest relationships are the most fraught because
  - In some ways, they are the “safest”
  - They are also the most important
  - Often times, what is being directed at you has build up over time of trying not to “overreact” in other relationships/situations

Before reacting, ask yourself, what is this really all about?
Interpersonal sensitivity and conflict

• Before you can validate, you often have to translate

• Beneath anger is often
  • Shame
    • Do you think I’m stupid? Bad? Ugly? Unlovable?
  • Fear
    • Will you leave me? Will you take care of me? If not, how will I survive?
Interpersonal sensitivity and conflict

• Before you can validate, you often have to translate

• Beneath rejection of help is often
  • Fear and shame re: real or perceived incompetence/skills deficit
Translation practice

- Please write in with an example of a situation/ conflict/ emotional reaction you need help “translating”
What is Validation?

- Relating to a person in a way that demonstrates that their perspective can be understood
What Validation Is Not

• Agreeing, capitulating, biting your tongue
How to Validate?

• Listen
• Affirm their position
• Understand what they are feeling (and why) even if you wouldn’t have the same reaction to the situation
• Differentiate from your point of view
• Strive for authenticity
Why Validate?

• Restores experience of connection
• Lowers emotional intensity
• Allows person to think and problem-solve
Validation practice
Collaborative Problem Solving

- Identify problem using neutral, non-blaming language
- Use language that indicates it’s a shared dilemma
- Ask for ideas rather than making suggestions immediately
  - If no ideas or ones that don’t work for you, ask if interested in hearing yours
  - If your idea is rejected, “ok that doesn’t work for you, what else could we do?”
  - Validate any contribution of ideas/suggestions
    - Get behaviorally specific about how something would actually work
- Attend to strong emotions, but place limits on aggression
- Stay calm
- Can return to task later if not making progress

Adapted from Betsy Evans, You Are Not Invited to My Birthday Party
• Listen
• Clarify
• Try to understand from their point of view, focus on feelings, not facts
• Validate what is validate
• Try to approach as shared problem
• Self-involving self-disclosure
• Observe own limits
• Don’t tolerate aggression (but do allow anger)
• Self-assess own capacity to engage productively, walk away if you need to but make a plan to come back