



McLean
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AFFILIATE

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND DECREASING CONFLICT

BPD Patient and Family Education Webinar

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8/10/16

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

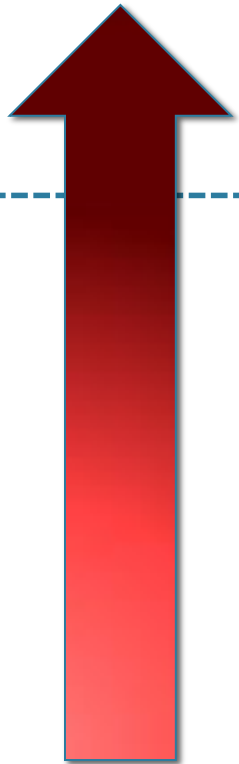
What goes wrong?

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

Externalizing



Internalizing

Self-Harm

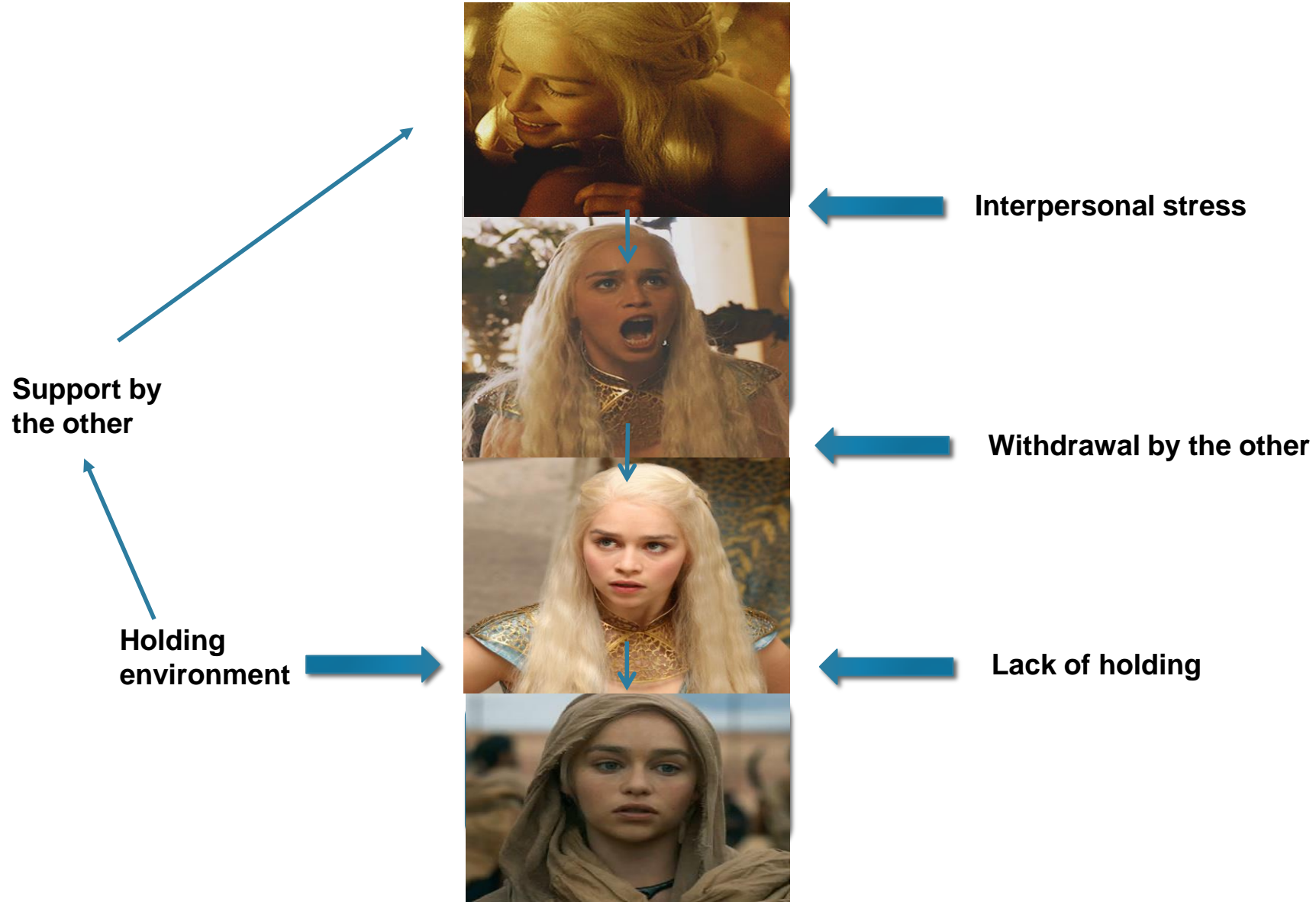
Impulsivity

Cognitive Disturbance

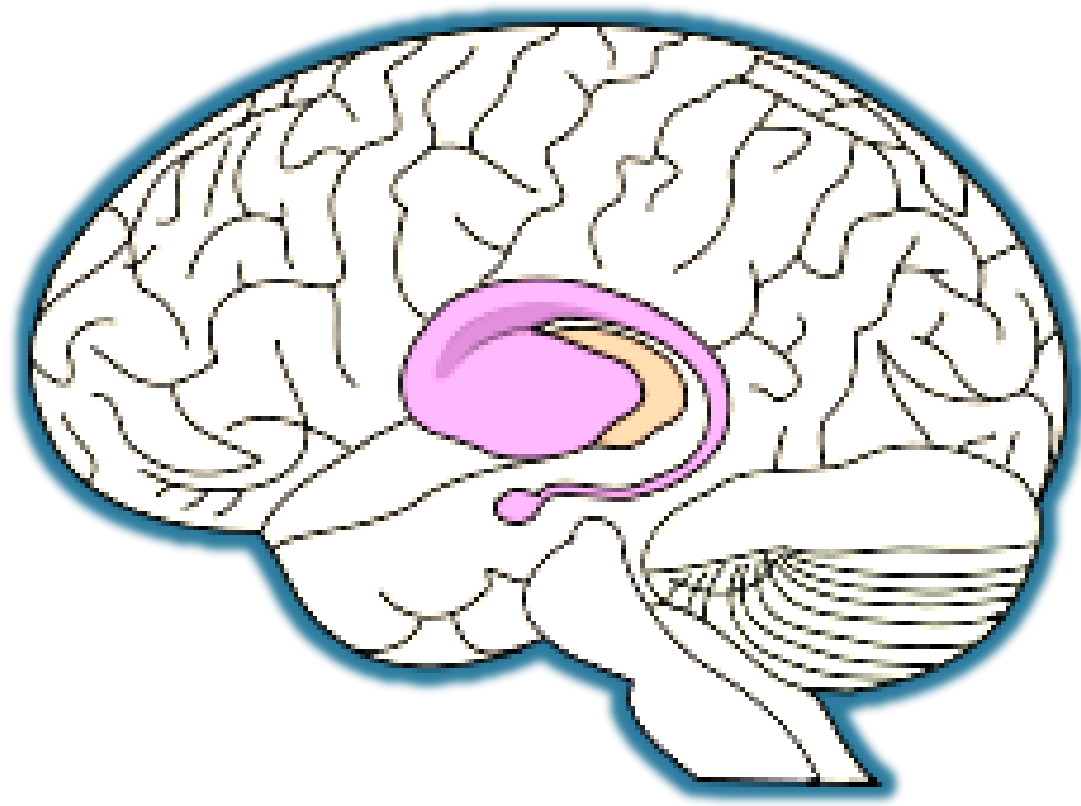
Emotional
Dysregulation

Interpersonal Hypersensitivity

Gunderson's Model of BPD



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

Summary

- 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