

THE
Relationships
Workbook for
BPD

Skills to Help You Cultivate
Emotional Safety, Deepen Understanding,
and Build Stronger Connections

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CHAPTER 1

Identifying Disruptive Factors in Relationships

Let's start by looking at the things in your relationship that might be causing problems, likely related to your borderline personality disorder (BPD). Relationships often deal with the same issues over and over, and how we see ourselves, others, and the world, including our FP, can be affected in both good and bad ways. BPD amplifies the complication of these issues and destructive tendencies but uncovering the underlying factors that add to the reasons they still exist will help empower you over your BPD. In this chapter, we're going to focus on you and creating the foundation for your relationship story.

The ten BPD relationship problem areas are common challenges that can disrupt your relationship with your FP, amplifying BPD urges, beliefs, behaviors, and patterns that increase the probability of relationship issues. For example, if you're often scared of being abandoned, you may become overbearing or needy, may always look for reassurance, or may even test the relationship to see if your FP truly cares. This may drive you to have unstable moods or pull away suddenly and give them the silent treatment, which can confuse and overwhelm your FP. Being very jealous or trying to control them might also push them away. These patterns can lead to frequent break-ups, mistrust, and difficulty believing in positive experiences, creating a cycle of emotional turmoil. By examining these problem areas and learning the skills you need, you can build a stronger bond with your FP, even while managing your BPD.

As you gain more emotional self-control, build recognition into your authentic self, and learn to communicate more openly about your emotions, desires, and needs, you can break these old maladaptive beliefs, behaviors, and patterns. Understanding how these problem areas impact your relationships can lead to healthier, more fulfilling connections, where both you and your FP feel more supported, heard, and understood.

Below are the top ten relationship problem areas, and if yours isn't on the list, that's okay. There's a spot for you to add your own if needed. As you go through this, think about your own experiences,

specific triggers, behaviors, and patterns that might be instigating or amplifying these issues. The exercise after the list is going to help you further identify which ones cause the greatest relationship disruption. The goal isn't to blame anyone but to better understand what's going on beneath the surface.

The Ten BPD Relationship Problem Areas

1. **Frequent fear of abandonment:** You often think your FP is planning to leave you, even if there's no clear identifiable reason. This can make you hypervigilant and constantly seek reassurance or try to test how much your FP cares.
2. **Overreaction to perceived slights:** Small disagreements or feeling criticized make you react strongly. You might get very upset, pull away, or even do things that hurt yourself.
3. **Unpredictable mood swings:** You go from feeling very loving to very angry with your FP quickly, and sometimes it's unclear what caused it.
4. **Excessive clinginess or neediness:** Due to your fear of abandonment, you always check in, need a lot of attention and reassurance, or lean too much on your FP.
5. **Sudden withdrawal or silent treatment:** You easily feel hurt or misunderstood, so you suddenly stop talking or pull away.
6. **Extreme jealousy and control issues:** You feel extreme jealousy and try to control your FP by constantly wanting to know where they are, checking their phone, or controlling who they talk to.
7. **Testing the relationship:** You do things to see how much your FP cares, like flirting with other people, pushing them away to see if they'll come back, or starting unnecessary fights.
8. **Frequent break-ups and make-ups:** Your relationship has frequent separations, break-ups, and make-ups in a short time.
9. **Difficulty in handling criticism:** Feedback, small and intended to be helpful, tends to feel like a major personal attack, leading to overreactions, arguments, or feelings of worthlessness.

10. Difficulty trusting positive experiences: You struggle to believe that good things, like love or compliments, are genuine. You constantly doubt your FP's feelings, even when everything seems fine.

Your specific relationship problem area: _____

These issues can create real challenges in relationships, often leading to misunderstandings, emotional exhaustion, and even trust problems. Managing them takes a lot of patience, understanding, and effort from both you and your FP. However, by learning specific skills and strategies, like how to handle emotional reactions, improve communication, and build trust, you can navigate these challenges more successfully and create a healthier, stronger connection.

Identifying Relationship Challenges

The exercise below will help you identify your top three BPD relationship problems. We'll be using this information as you go through the workbook to develop insight and build your personal growth and relationship strategies. For now, you'll be asked to rate how often each problem occurs and how much it affects your relationship with your FP. Rate each one from 0 (none at all) to 10 (happens every day and extreme negative impact).

1. Frequent fear of abandonment

How often do you worry your FP will leave you, even without proof?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Overreaction to perceived slights

How often do you overreact to small disagreements or criticisms?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Unpredictable mood swings

How often do your feelings for your FP swing from love to anger?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Excessive clinginess or neediness

How often do you feel the need for constant attention or closeness with your FP?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Sudden withdrawal or silent treatment

How often do you give your FP the silent treatment or suddenly withdraw when you feel hurt?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Extreme jealousy and control issues

How often do you feel extremely jealous or try to control your FP's actions?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Testing the relationship

How often do you test your FP's love by creating conflicts or pushing them away?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Frequent break-ups and reconciliations

How often does your relationship go through separations, break-ups, and make-ups?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Difficulty handling criticism

How often do you intensely react to feedback that is small or intended to be helpful?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Difficulty trusting positive experiences

How often do you doubt your FP's love or positive actions?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. Your specific relationship problem area: _____

How often does this occur?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What's the degree of negative impact on your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Find your top three BPD relationship problem areas based on your ratings and put them in the spaces below. If you have more than three, try your best to narrow it down to three. This might be hard, but for now, we want to focus on identifying the greatest and most impactful problems and building skills to manage them. Don't worry, you can always come back later and work on the other areas too.

1	2	3
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Listing your top three BPD relationship problem areas and how often they occur and to what degree will help you notice not only when they arise but the intensity of them as well. The second part of this chapter is going to help you build insight into their origin and why they're still in your life. The next exercise may be hard for you. Allow yourself time to process the information and resist feeling pressured to get it all done in a hurry.

How They Started and Why They Stayed

The following exercise will help you build a deeper understanding of your top three relationship problem areas and why they've stayed around and attached to your BPD. These problem areas, like getting upset over small things, having mood swings, or not trusting when good things happen, are likely from past experiences and internalized beliefs, which helped create BPD behavior and patterns. When you think about relationship problems, you've likely noticed how they keep showing up, amplifying your feelings and driving you to react in ways that lead to arguments, hurt feelings, or

misunderstandings. This causes you to easily feel stuck and hopeless when you keep repeating the same patterns again and again. It's time to be a pattern breaker, opening yourself up to new options and experiences that help you grow beyond your BPD.

By working through this exercise, you'll start to see how these beliefs and behaviors play a role in the creation and perpetuation of your BPD relationship problem areas. Let's tackle this!

How They Started

Start by reviewing the list of twenty possible reasons you developed BPD, such as emotional neglect or an unstable family environment. Check the boxes that match your experiences and then think about how each of these might have contributed to the creation of your top three relationship problem areas.

- Emotional Invalidation:** When your feelings were often ignored or dismissed by others, especially as a child.
- Harsh Criticism:** Constantly being criticized or judged harshly, making it hard to feel good about yourself.
- Physical Abuse:** Being physically hurt or punished in a way that was unfair or extreme.
- Severe Punishment:** Receiving punishment that felt excessive or unjust.
- Emotional Abuse:** Being mistreated emotionally by parents, caregivers, or others who were supposed to take care of you.
- Inconsistent Parenting:** Having parents who would change their behavior often, sometimes being very caring, and other times being distant or harsh.
- Neglect:** Not getting enough care, attention, or love when you needed it.
- Lack of Support:** Not having anyone to turn to when you needed help or advice.
- Unstable Family Life:** Growing up in a home with frequent arguments, break-ups, or fights.
- Feeling Unloved:** Growing up feeling like you weren't loved or appreciated for who you are.
- Abandonment:** Feeling like important people in your life left you or didn't care about you.
- Witnessing Violence:** Seeing violence or abusive behavior in your home or environment.
- Inconsistent Love:** Sometimes getting love and other times being ignored or punished without knowing why.
- Mental Health Issues in the Family:** Having family members with mental health issues that affected how they treated you.

- Overprotective Parenting:** Having parents who were overly controlling, making you feel like you couldn't make decisions.
- Parental Separation or Divorce:** Going through your parents separating or divorcing, causing confusion or fear about relationships.
- Chaotic Home Environment:** Living in a home that felt unpredictable, unsafe, or stressful most of the time.
- Trauma:** Experiencing a traumatic event, like the loss of a loved one or witnessing something very scary or upsetting.
- Verbal Abuse:** Being yelled at, insulted, or threatened by those around you.
- Bullying:** Being bullied or picked on by others, making you feel alone and insecure.

List any other possible origin that may not be listed above: _____

Think about your top three relationship problem areas. For each one, write how your early life experiences might have shaped those problems. Use the space below each one to think about how things like mood swings, trust issues, or fear of being left may come from your past. If it feels like too much, it's okay to stop, take a break, or ask your therapist or FP to help you. This is about understanding where your struggles started and how they affect your relationships now. Be as honest as you can. You're doing this for you.

INSIGHT-GUIDING QUESTIONS:

1. Could your relationship problem area have started because you felt emotionally unsupported or invalidated in the past? For example, did people often ignore your feelings or make you feel like you couldn't express yourself?
2. Was there a time when you learned to expect people to leave you or stop caring about you? Did these feelings of abandonment continue into adult relationships, making it hard to trust others?
3. Think about whether your relationship problem areas are connected to experiences when you felt emotionally unsafe or criticized. Did you develop maladaptive beliefs, behaviors, and patterns because you were in environments that made you feel judged or inadequate?

- To Avoid Abandonment:** You use controlling or manipulative behaviors to prevent people from leaving.
- To Feel Important:** Dramatic actions make you feel like you matter, even when the result is negative.
- To Feel in Control:** Acting out helps you feel in control when your emotions are overwhelming.
- To Gain Power:** You use manipulative behaviors to feel more powerful in relationships.
- To Validate Negative Self-View:** You behave in ways that confirm your belief that you're unlovable or worthless.
- To Validate Emotional Instability:** Your chaotic behaviors match how unstable you feel inside, reinforcing your beliefs.
- Fear of Being Vulnerable:** Keeping emotional walls up protects you from being hurt, even if it damages relationships.
- To Avoid Feeling Inadequate:** You engage in behaviors that make others feel guilty, avoiding feelings of not being enough.
- To Get Attention:** Extreme behaviors may be used to get attention or care from others, even if it's negative attention.
- To Test Loyalty:** Pushing people away helps you see if others will come back, proving loyalty.
- To Avoid Rejection:** By pushing others away first, you avoid the possibility of being rejected.
- To Control Anxiety:** Repeating the same behaviors helps you manage the anxiety you feel when things change.
- Emotional Numbing:** Engaging in risky or self-harming behaviors blocks out painful emotions.
- To Confirm Fears About Relationships:** You behave in ways that confirm your belief that all relationships are unstable.
- To Avoid Disappointment:** You expect the worst in relationships, so you sabotage things to avoid feeling let down.
- To Feel Less Alone:** Negative behaviors may be a way to make sure others stay involved with you, even if it's through conflict.
- To Feel Emotionally Protected:** You hold onto defensive behaviors to shield yourself from feeling emotionally exposed.
- To Avoid Emotional Growth:** Sticking to old patterns keeps you from facing the hard work of emotional growth and change.

INSIGHT-GUIDING QUESTIONS:

1. What behaviors do you continue to engage in because they make you feel safe, even if they harm your relationships? For example, you might avoid addressing problems in the relationship to stay emotionally protected, but this can prevent genuine and open connection and allow issues to build up over time.
2. How might the beliefs you developed about yourself, like thinking you're unlovable or always going to be abandoned, still affect how you interact in relationships today? For example, do you push people away before they can leave you?
3. What emotions are you trying to avoid when you repeat certain behaviors, such as emotional numbing or acting out? For instance, are you avoiding feelings of rejection or fear of failure?

Problem Area 1: _____

Problem Area 2: _____

Problem Area 3: _____

Great job! I know this was not an easy task. Insight building can be a scary thing, but it's a necessary process to help you have stronger relationships with everyone you know, including your FP. You may want to return to this chapter from time to time and redo it as you learn more skills and start to see changes in yourself and in your relationships.

The information in this chapter will guide you as you progress through the workbook. It will help you expand your thinking and understand that there are different ways to manage BPD beliefs,

behaviors, and patterns. You'll see that there are options and possibilities for positive changes, allowing you to embrace the love and caring that you, and everyone, deserve in life.

Setting the Stage for Relationship Success

Using the spaces below, pull together what you learned from this chapter so you can take this information with you and use it in your relationships.

How will what you've learned in this chapter help you manage your top three BPD relationship problem areas?

In what ways can this knowledge help you respond more calmly to disagreements or feedback?

What can you take from this chapter that can help you have greater mood stabilization and consistency in your relationship?

What can you use from this chapter to build a closer relationship with your FP?

How can what you've learned in this chapter help you increase trust, acceptance, and love in your relationship?

In the next chapter, we're going to dive deeper into understanding BPD and how to explain it to your FP. You'll start with a BPD FAQ and explore the BPD paradox, how some protective behaviors harm your relationships, and what strengthens or weakens your connections. Self-determination and empowered choice is what lies ahead, so let's not wait, let's get to it!

A NEW HARBINGER SELF-HELP WORKBOOK

THE Relationships Workbook for BPD

Skills to Help You Cultivate Emotional Safety,
Deepen Understanding, and Build Stronger Connections

A safe space for people with borderline personality disorder to:

Unlearn destructive patterns • Overcome fear of abandonment

Create and sustain close relationships

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