

What is a Personality Disorder?

Within the field of mental health, with the range of diagnoses and difficulties that individual's may experience, exists a category of diagnoses referred to as personality disorders. Some people confuse this label with the diagnosis "multiple personality disorder," which is the colloquial term used for someone experiencing a severe loss of awareness of reality, often triggered by intense trauma. Such a diagnosis is extremely rare--but personality disorders, on the other hand, have been estimated to occur in as many as 60% of the adult population in the United States. That means that along with diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, Bipolar Disorder, or Pain Disorder, many individuals may experience what mental health professionals describe as difficulties relating to others and understanding situations and people. Individuals with personality disorders have rigid and inflexible ways of looking at the world, interpreting everything through this lens.

As was just mentioned, a person can have BOTH a personality disorder and a mood or other type of mental health disorder; in cases like this, the personality disorder can actually worsen the symptoms of the other mental health problems. More significant irritability or sadness with a depression, poorer management of panic and anxiety in an anxiety disorder, or more extreme mood fluctuations with Bipolar Disorder are examples of such exacerbated symptoms.

How can one tell if an individual has a personality disorder? For an accurate and helpful diagnosis, only a trained mental health professional can accurately assess such information. However, some general characteristics of a personality disorder include:

- Poor management of mood fluctuations
- Difficult interpersonal relationships
- Trouble making and keeping solid relationships
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Acts of self-injury or suicidal threats or attempts
- Chronic mistrust of others
- Obsessive or paranoid thoughts