

# Overview - Personality Disorder

Personality disorders cause a person to think, feel and act unpredictably. Symptoms are made worse by stress. Treatment includes talk therapies and medication. There are three types of personality disorder:

- **Cluster A 'Odd or eccentric'** - sees other people as alien and may appear to be living in a fantasy world.
- **Cluster B 'Dramatic, emotional or erratic'** - struggles to regulate their feelings and often swings between positive and negative views of others.
- **Cluster C 'Anxious and fearful'** - struggles with persistent and overwhelming feelings of anxiety and fear.

## **Students with a personality disorder may find the following difficult:**

- Keeping negative feelings such as distress, anxiety, worthlessness or anger under control.
- Coping with unwelcome demands and disturbances in everyday life without seeing these as personal threats.
- Staying rational and in contact with reality.
- Being consistent in their attitudes to others – e.g. sometimes trusting people and sometimes not.
- Feeling connected to others and building close relationships.
- Managing negative feelings without self-harming or threatening others.



## Top tips for teaching students with a personality disorder:

- Be flexible about attendance and participation; students may sometimes be too distressed to attend or contribute.
- Help them to pace academic tasks and to have reasonable expectations of achievement.
- Check whether their Individual Learning Plans include adjusted deadlines.
- Be clear about what is and is not acceptable behaviour.
- Be open to students talking about their health experiences and listen actively. Ask what would be helpful.
- If students appear unwell, acknowledge this and encourage them to access professional help.
- If students are in a high emotion state:
  - Keep communications clear and simple.
  - Stay calm and avoid getting defensive.
  - Listen actively and ask questions.
  - Make sure they feel heard.

### Useful links

- <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/problems/personalitydisorders/personalitydisorder.aspx>
- <http://www.topuk.org>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/personality-disorders/#.W2Gqo02WwdU>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/personality-disorder>

