

Reality checking 10 misperceptions your loved one with BPD may fear

When someone with attachment trauma is “**splitting**” or experiencing a period in which they view people, situations, or even themselves in extreme, all-or-nothing terms, as entirely "good" or entirely "bad," anxiety about being misperceived and the relational consequences of such an episode can compound the pain and make it that much harder to ground in the present. This list may be what the individual is thinking about themselves and projecting onto you, or they may know the reality but worry that they won't be understood or believed.

Sometimes support and co-regulation looks like reassuring the individual that you know they are attempting to manage dysregulation, fear of abandonment, rejection, or overwhelming stress by simplifying complex feelings, and that while you may be affected by their behavior, you will be with them through it. Stating that you are *not* perceiving them in the following feared ways may help foster safety in the relationship. Of course, splitting looks different for everyone, and reassurance might be as triggering to some as it is helpful to others.

Check with your person to see which of these fears are relevant for them and what it would be helpful to hear in the moment.

1. "I'm manipulative and attention-seeking."

Reality: People with BPD often express intense emotions because they are experiencing overwhelming distress, not because they are trying to manipulate. Emotional outbursts are attempts to communicate genuine pain and fear of abandonment.

2. "I'm too much for anyone to handle."

Reality: Intensity doesn't make someone inherently “too much.” Everyone has moments of emotional overwhelm. BPD can just amplify those moments. Relationships can thrive with understanding and boundaries.

3. "I'm unstable and unreliable."

Reality: Emotional intensity can fluctuate, but that doesn't define a person's character. People with BPD often care deeply and work hard to maintain relationships despite their internal struggles.

4. "I'm dangerous and out of control."

Reality: Dysregulation is not the same as being dangerous. Splitting episodes reflect emotional dysregulation and fear, not a desire to harm or lose control. With support, these moments pass.

5. "I'm selfish for needing so much reassurance."

Reality: Seeking reassurance is a response to deep insecurity and fear of abandonment, not selfishness. Everyone needs reassurance. People with BPD just feel that need more intensely.

6. “I push people away on purpose.”

Reality: Splitting often comes from a deep fear of rejection or abandonment. Pushing people away is a protective mechanism, not a conscious desire to end relationships.

7. “It’s always going to be like this.”

Reality: Emotional intensity can decrease with time, support, and coping strategies. People with BPD are capable of growth, healing, and building stable relationships.

8. “I’m manipulative because I change my feelings so quickly.”

Reality: Rapid emotional shifts (or mood swings) are not intentional or calculated. They reflect the brain’s sensitivity to emotional cues, not manipulation.

9. “I’m a bad person because I see people as all good or all bad.”

Reality: Splitting is a defense mechanism in response to emotional overwhelm and fear. It doesn't define someone's morality or character. It reflects how they feel in the moment, not who they are.

10. “People will leave if they see how I really feel.”

Reality: Vulnerability can strengthen relationships when shared with people who are safe and supportive. Those who truly care will often stay and seek to understand.