Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) FACTS
‘Families and Carers Training and Support Programme’
A short course for family members and friends of people who have BPD

Module 1: Introduction to BPD
Module 2: Mindfulness and Emotion Management
Module 3: Mentalizing
Module 4: Validation
Module 5: Problem Solving

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Homework:
Mental State Stories.
- Exercise sheet
- Answer sheet

Reading the Mind in the Eyes.
- Exercise sheet
- Answer sheet

Scenarios
Scenario suggestion form

Feedback
Feedback form
Module 3 – Mentalizing

It is thought that the human brain is essentially made up of three different brain structures: the **brainstem**, the **limbic system** and the **cortex**.

1. **The brainstem**: The reptilian or primitive part of the brain. This part of the brain is responsible for controlling our **basic, vital body functions**, such as breathing and heart rate. It allows us to react **instinctively** to avoid danger, find food, and procreate. The brainstem is the first brain structure to develop.

2. **The limbic system (including the amygdala and hippocampus)**: The emotional part of the brain. The limbic system is at the centre of our **emotions** – monitoring, understanding and building emotional connections. This system develops during adolescence. Adolescents have lots of emotions, which they sometimes struggle to control! The control or brake for the emotions is the **frontal lobe/prefrontal cortex**.

3. **The frontal lobe/prefrontal cortex**: The analytical part of the brain. The cortex interprets and **makes sense** of feelings, emotions and situations that occur. It is responsible for **reflecting on** and **processing** information. This area is influenced by environment and educational experience during childhood and throughout adolescence.

**Mentalizing**

As the brain develops, it creates memories and uses these as **templates** to interpret other experiences and direct our behaviour. If we never reflect on these templates or check their accuracy, they get stronger. However, if we do reflect, they can be changed, releasing painful past experiences.

Mentalizing is this **ability to reflect on the emotional, instinctive responses in ourselves and others**. When we start to mentalize, our thinking processes move from the primitive and emotional parts of the brain to the analytical, reflective brain. The ability to mentalize emerges more fully at around 4 years of age, when a child starts to recognize more easily that a person may think and feel differently from him/herself and can start to problem solve, accounting for others’ **perspectives and views**.
Sometimes, children aren’t shown effective ways of managing their emotions or do not develop them because of their temperament. As a result, their 'templates' for managing emotions can be inadequate and their ways of responding can be ineffective (especially in times of crisis and perceived threat).

Mentalizing is disrupted by stressful situations. People without effective templates can use other coping mechanisms, such as self-harm, substance abuse and impulsive behaviour, to manage stress. Sometimes, this can further stop mentalizing/reflecting, making the emotional and primitive parts of the brain more active and dominant.

In stressful situations, people with BPD tend to ‘lose’ mentalizing, and in doing so make others ‘lose’ mentalizing.

Two concepts that go hand in hand with mentalizing are empathy and mindfulness. 

**Empathy** is sensing feelings and emotions in others and attempting to understand them, even if we disagree or feel differently. It has two sides: **Tuning in** and **imagination**:

- **Tuning in** is the intuitive ability to read facial expressions and body language. Humans have special ‘mirror neurons’ in the brain that react when watching someone do something. This allows us to perceive the person’s thoughts.

- **Imagination** is ‘putting our self in someone else’s shoes’, suspending our own view of the world and thinking of how they may be experiencing something.

Another concept, mindfulness, originated from Buddhism. Mindfulness describes a skill of having enhanced attention to, and awareness of, a current experience. It requires a person to be open to sensations without judging or coming to conclusions about them. It allows a person to mentalize by focusing the mind.

Mindfulness aids mentalizing by helping to put a ‘pause’ between our thoughts, feelings and actions.

The difference between mentalizing and mindfulness is that mindfulness is about our own mind, whereas mentalizing accounts for both our own and others’ states of mind. When someone is mindful of another mind, they are mentalizing. **Mindfulness was discussed in Module 2.**

Mentalizing and mindfulness of a current experience requires the ability to rapidly shift focus from full participation to stepping back to allow observation and reflection, and then returning to participate again (a ‘self-reflection loop’).
The Oxford English Dictionary gives two definitions of the word **mentalize**:

1) To construct or picture in the mind, to imagine, or to give a mental quality to.
2) To develop or cultivate mentally or to stimulate the mind of.

**What happens when you are not able to mentalize?**

There can be no true **communication** and **understanding** in relationships without mentalizing, and no personal security, if we aren’t aware of how we feel, or if we lose sight or another person’s mind and motives.

Uncertainty makes us anxious and wary, and inability to ‘read people’ makes us uncomfortable, suspicious and mistrustful.

Maintaining mentalizing is therefore vital for **mental health**, **social functioning** and intimate **relationships**, yet it is easily lost in stressful situations. As mentioned earlier, this is particularly the case for people with BPD.

Mentalizing is a **curiosity** about our own and someone else’s experiences, thoughts and feelings; treating our interpretation as a ‘best guess’ without making assumptions. Mentalizing is like story telling: it involves coming up with fresh viewpoints and making sense of situations. It requires making an effort and thinking beyond the surface, with a willingness to question our understanding.

**Aspects of mentalizing:**

- **Curiosity**: Being genuinely interested in others’ thoughts and emotions, and respectful of their perspective. Being open to discovery about the other person, and reluctant to make assumptions or to hold on to prejudices about what they think or feel.
- **Being safe in uncertainty**: Acknowledging that you can only imagine or make an informed guess about what others are thinking. Being uncertain is safe, as you are edging towards greater clarity.
- **Reflective contemplation**: A reflective, relaxed and open approach, rather than a controlled and compulsive pursuit of how others think and feel.
- **Perspective taking**: Acceptance that a shared experience can look very different from different perspectives, reflecting an individual’s different experiences and past. Some people are more sensitive or aware of things than others because of previous experience.
- **Forgiveness**: Understanding the actions of others and accepting them as they are.
- **Impact awareness**: Appreciating how your thoughts, emotions and actions may affect others.
- **A trusting attitude**.
- **Humility**: Knowing and understanding someone else and therefore willingness to learn from others regardless of their status.
- **Playfulness and humour**: May be an expression of humility
• **Willingness to take turns:** ‘Give and take’ in interactions, including the ability to explain openly in the hope of being understood.

• **Belief in changeability:** Minds can be changed and therefore so can people’s behaviour.

• **Assuming responsibility and accepting accountability:** Your actions are generated by your thoughts, emotions, wishes, beliefs and desires, whether or not you are fully conscious about this at the time.

• **Patience**

• **Questioning:** Ask for descriptions of the other person’s experience, i.e. ‘What?’ rather than ‘Why?’

• **Avoid needing to understand.**

• **Avoid needing to be right:** If you can’t agree, try to accept that the other person’s experience is equally valid.

• **Avoid telling someone what they feel and why they are like they are:** It is better to speak about your own perspective (a person with BPD may do this, but don’t get drawn in).

How to recognize if someone is not mentalizing, and how to use an imaginary ‘pause button’ to help the situation

They may become excessively **angry** or appear unreasonably **upset**, responding inappropriately. You might react to this with an equally emotional response. At this point, press the imaginary ‘pause’ button. If possible, then ‘rewind’ your mind to a point when you were thinking clearly and were less emotional – step back from the situation.

When trying to read people, we can focus on external cues – their facial expression, tone of voice, body posture – to indicate what they might be thinking. This is called external mentalizing. However, sometimes cues can be misleading, and we shouldn’t make assumptions purely on observations. Relying only on what you see and hear lowers the accuracy of mentalizing.

People with BPD use external mentalizing but can be very **sensitive** to facial expressions and eye movements, and tend to **assume** underlying states of mind rather than checking them.

When we aren’t mentalizing, we become occupied with **rules** and responsibilities, ‘shoulds’ and ‘should nots’; we deny our involvement in a problem, **blaming** and engaging in fault-finding; and we start becoming uncertain about our thoughts or the feelings of others. If this happens, it can help if you mentally press the ‘pause’ button and try to ‘rewind’ the conversation.
How to talk to someone who is not mentalizing:

1) **Try to focus** on what is going on for **them**.
2) **Do not react** to what is going on in you.
3) Ask yourself ‘What is happening for them right now?’
4) Suggest that **you may be doing something** that is creating their state of mind.
5) Suggest that you would like to understand things from their point of view but it is difficult if they keep shouting etc.
6) Say that you cannot think when they are shouting etc.
7) Suggest a few minutes **time out** to go back to Step 1, asking what is going on for them.
8) When you begin to appreciate their state of mind, make sure you say so.

**Additional stages:** How mentalizing can help you cope

**Resolve conflicts** using aspects of mentalizing listed above (Module 5 on Problem Solving will cover more of this).

Establish your level of **tolerance**: Choose a calm time to establish your limits and let your expectations be known. Do not express threats. Listen carefully to their response.
Module 3: Mentalizing. Homework Exercise 1

Mental State Stories

These stories were created by Happe (1994), in order to assess perspective taking and understanding of others' mental states.

Read through each story and answer the question as best you can.

1. Simon is a big liar. Simon’s brother Jim knows this; he knows that Simon never tells the truth! Now yesterday Simon stole Jim’s Ping-Pong paddle, and Jim knows Simon has hidden it somewhere, though he can’t find it. He’s very cross. So he finds Simon and he says, ‘Where is my Ping-Pong paddle? You must have hidden it either in the cupboard or under your bed, because I’ve looked everywhere else. Where is it, in the cupboard or under your bed?’ Simon tells him the paddle is under his bed.

Q: Why will Jim look in the cupboard for the paddle?

2. During the war, the Red army captures a member of the Blue army. They want him to tell them where his army’s tanks are; they know they are either by the sea or in the mountains. They know that the prisoner will not want to tell them, he will want to save his army, and so he will certainly lie to them. The prisoner is very brave and very clever, he will not let them find his tanks. The tanks are really in the mountains. Now when the other side asks him where his tanks are, he says, ‘They are in the mountains.’

Q: Why did the prisoner say that?

3. Brian is always hungry. Today at school it is his favourite meal – sausages and beans. He is a very greedy boy, and he would like to have more sausages than anybody else, even though his mother will have made him a lovely meal when he gets home! But everyone is allowed two sausages and no more. When it is Brian’s turn to be served, he says, ‘Oh, please can I have four sausages, because I won’t be having any dinner when I get home!’

Q: Why does Brian say this?
4. Jill wanted to buy a kitten, so she went to see Mrs. Smith, who had lots of kittens she didn’t want. Now Mrs. Smith loved the kittens, and she wouldn’t do anything to harm them, though she couldn’t keep them all herself. When Jill visited she wasn’t sure she wanted one of Mrs. Smith’s kittens, since they were all males and she had wanted a female. But Mrs. Smith said, ‘If no one buys the kittens I’ll just have to drown them!’

Q: Why did Mrs. Smith say that?

5. One day, Aunt Jane comes to visit Peter. Now Peter loves his aunt very much, but today she is wearing a new hat; a new hat which Peter thinks is very ugly indeed. Peter thinks his aunt looks silly in it, and much nicer in her old hat. But when Aunt Jane asks Peter, ‘How do you like my new hat?’, Peter says, ‘Oh, it’s very nice…’

Q: Why does he say that?

6. Helen waited all year for Christmas, because she knew at Christmas she could ask her parents for a rabbit. Helen wanted a rabbit more than anything in the world. At last Christmas Day arrived, and Helen ran to unwrap the big box her parents had given her. She felt sure it would contain a little rabbit in a cage. But when she opened it, with all the family standing round, she found her present was just a boring old set of encyclopaedias, which Helen did not want at all! Still, when Helen’s parents asked her how she liked her Christmas present, she said, ‘It’s lovely, thank you. It’s just what I wanted’.

Q: Why did she say this?

7. Late one night old Mrs. Peabody is walking home. She doesn’t like walking home alone in the dark because she is always afraid that someone will attack her and rob her. She really is a very nervous person! Suddenly, out of the shadows comes a man. He wants to ask Mrs. Peabody what time it is, so he walks toward her. When Mrs. Peabody sees the man coming toward her, she starts to tremble and says, ‘Take my purse, just don’t hurt me please!’

Q: Why did she say that?

8. A burglar who has just robbed a shop is making his getaway. As he is running home, a policeman on his beat sees him drop his glove. He doesn’t know the man is a burglar, he just wants to tell him he dropped his glove. But when the policeman shouts out to the burglar, ‘Hey, you! Stop!’ the burglar turns round, sees the policeman and gives himself up. He puts his hands up and admits that he did the break-in at the local shop.

Q: Why did the burglar do that?
9. A burglar is about to break into a jeweller’s shop. He skilfully picks the lock on the shop door. Carefully he steps over the electronic detector beam. If he breaks this beam it will set off the alarm. Quietly, he opens the door of the store-room and sees the gems glittering. As he reaches out, however, he steps on something soft. He hears a screech and something small and furry runs out past him, toward the shop door. Immediately the alarm sounds.

Q: Why did the alarm go off?
Module 3: Homework Exercise 1 Answers

Mental State Stories – Answers

1.  
2 points—reference to Jim knowing Simon lies

1 point—reference to facts (that’s where it really is, Simon’s a big liar) or Simon hiding it without reference to implications of lying

0 points—reference to general nonspecific information (because he looked everywhere else)

2.  
2 points—reference to fact that other army will not believe and hence look in the other place, reference to prisoner’s realization that that’s what they’ll do, or reference to double bluff

1 point—reference to outcome (to save his army’s tanks) or to mislead them

0 points—reference to motivation that misses the point of double bluff (he was scared)

3.  
2 points—reference to fact that he’s trying to elicit sympathy, being deceptive

1 point—reference to his state (greedy), outcome (to get more sausages) or factual

0 points—reference to a motivation that misses the point of sympathy elicitation/deception, or factually incorrect

4.  
2 points—reference to persuasion, manipulating feelings, trying to induce guilt/pity

1 point—reference to outcome (to sell them or get rid of them in a way which implies not drowning) or simple motivation (to make Jill sad)

0 points—reference to general knowledge or dilemma without realization that the statement was not true (she’s a horrible woman)

5.  
2 points—reference to white lie or wanting to spare her feelings; some implication that this is for aunt’s benefit rather than just for his, desire to avoid rudeness or insult

1 point—reference to trait (he’s a nice boy) or relationship (he likes his aunt); purely motivational (so she won’t shout at him) with no reference to aunt’s thoughts or feelings; incomplete explanation (he’s lying, he’s pretending).

0 points—reference to irrelevant or incorrect facts/feelings (he likes the hat, he wants to trick her)
6.  
2 points—reference to white lie or wanting to spare their feelings; some implication that this is for parent’s benefit rather than just for her, desire to avoid rudeness or insult  
1 point—reference to trait (she’s a nice girl) or relationship (she likes her parents); purely motivational (so they won’t shout at her) with no reference to parents’ thoughts or feelings; incomplete explanation (she’s lying, she’s pretending)  
0 points—reference to irrelevant or incorrect facts/feelings (she likes the present, she wants to trick them)  

7.  
2 points—reference to her belief that he was going to mug her or her ignorance of his real intention  
1 point—reference to her trait (she’s nervous) or state (she’s scared) or intention (so he wouldn’t hurt her) without suggestion that fear was unnecessary  
0 points—factually incorrect/irrelevant answers; reference to the man actually intending to attack her  

8.  
2 points—reference to belief that policeman knew that he’d burgled the shop  
1 point—reference to something factually correct in story  
0 points—factually incorrect/irrelevant answers  

9.  
2 points—reference to animal which the burglar disturbed setting off alarm by crossing beam (type of animal unimportant)  
1 point—reference to burglar setting off alarm (he was startled by the animal so crossed the beam); reference to animal setting off alarm without explaining it crossed the beam (he trod on a cat and it set off the alarm)  
0 points—reference to irrelevant or incorrect factors (the animal’s screech set off the alarm); alternative reasons for alarm going off (a security camera saw him and set the alarm off)
Module 3: Homework Exercise 2

Reading the Mind in the Eyes

It is said that the eyes are the most revealing part of a person, and are where one can get clues about another’s emotional state. This task was created by Baron-Cohen et al (1997), to assess the ability to read another person’s mental states through their eyes.

Put yourself in the mind of the person you see in the picture and imagine what emotion they are feeling. Circle the most appropriate emotion from the 4 listed on the right of each picture.

1. Playful, comforting, irritated, bored
2. Joking, flustered, desire, convinced
3. Irritated, sarcastic, worried, friendly
4. Aghast, fantasizing, impatient, alarmed
5. Apologetic, friendly, uneasy, dispirited
6. Despondent, relieved, shy, excited
7. Cautious, insisting, bored, aghast
8. Indifferent, embarrassed, sceptical, dispirited
9. Decisive, anticipating, threatening, shy
10. Irritated, disappointed, depressed, accusing
11. Irritated, thoughtful, encouraging, sympathetic
12. Doubtful, affectionate, playful, aghast
13. Decisive, amused, aghast, bored
14. Arrogant, grateful, sarcastic, tentative
15. Dominant, friendly, guilty, horrified
Module 3: Homework Exercise 2

Reading the Mind in the Eyes – Answer Sheet

1. Playful
2. Desire
3. Worried
4. Fantasizing
5. Uneasy
6. Despondent
7. Cautious
8. Sceptical
9. Anticipating
10. Accusing
11. Thoughtful
12. Doubtful
13. Decisive
14. Tentative
15. Friendly
Suggestions for ‘Scenarios’ for use in FACTS courses

**Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)**

**FACTS**

**Families and Carers Training and Support Programme**

We are always looking for ideas for discussions or role-play to help explain the different skills in FACTS.

Please give us any examples and suggest which skills might be helpful.

With many thanks for your help.

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**Which skill/s might have been useful?** *(Or leave it to us to decide how to use your suggestion).*

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**Which skill/s might have been useful?** *(Or leave it to us to decide how to use your suggestion).*

Please complete this form and leave it on your seat. Alternatively, email it to BPDHarrow2015@yahoo.co.uk.
Feedback Form Module 3 Mentalizing

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)
FACTS 2017

Families and Carers Training and Support Programme

Please complete this form and leave it on your seat.

Alternatively, email it to BPDHarrow2015@yahoo.co.uk.

This information will help us to ensure the course is helpful to future participants.

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<td>Please rate how useful the session was to you</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>Please rate the session delivery</td>
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<td>Please rate the Slides/handouts</td>
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<td>How much of the material was familiar to you?</td>
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