



SA Federation for  
Mental Health

## PERSONALITY DISORDERS

### GENERAL PERSONALITY DISORDER

#### What it is:

Each individual has certain personality traits that are exhibited in how they perceive, think about and relate to their environment and themselves. These traits are often exhibited in specific behaviour in both social and personal contexts. However, for some individuals these personality traits may be inflexible, maladaptive or cause distress or impairment to themselves or others, and this kind of behaviour can constitute a personality disorder.

Personality disorders are characterised by behaviour and feelings that differ greatly from the accepted cultural norm, and this can manifest in thought patterns, emotions, interpersonal relationships, or impulse control. These patterns of behaviour or feelings are long term, and are visible in all aspects of the individual's life. They can also lead to distress or impairment in the individual's home, work or social life.

The personality traits and behaviours associated with general personality disorder should be distinguished from possible symptoms of other mental disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder or psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, or a different medical condition such as head trauma. The personality traits or behaviours should also not be caused by any substance or medication that the individual has taken. General personality disorder traits typically begin to manifest in adolescence or early adulthood.

#### Common symptoms:

A long term pattern of feelings and behaviour that differ greatly from the expectations of the individual's culture. This can be manifest in various ways such as:

1. Thought patterns, for example how they individual sees themselves and others, how they interpret events, repetitive thoughts
2. Emotions, for example, the intensity of the individuals emotions, their range of emotions, the appropriateness of their emotional responses
3. Interpersonal functioning, for example how the individual is able to relate to, and communicate with others, and how they behave in relationships

4. Impulse control, for example, the individual seems to have no ability to control their temper, or to stop themselves from doing something that is considered to be wrong, such as stealing or committing an act of physical violence



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### **Causes:**

There are genetic and physiological factors that could put an individual at increased risk of developing a general personality disorder. Having a close relative with a personality disorder could increase an individual's likelihood of also developing a personality disorder. Environmental factors such as childhood physical or sexual abuse, neglect and other trauma are also potential risk factors.