

LIFE IN MY BODY...

WITH BODY DYSMORPHIA

CARLY ASQUITH, 22, a teaching assistant from Barnsley, explains what it's like to live with BDD

Watching from a window as my friends played in the garden, I stood inside brushing my hair. I wanted to be a part of their fun – but I felt I *had* to keep brushing over and over. I was 11 years old. I didn't know why I was doing it, so when my friends asked – pointing out that my hair looked fine – I didn't know what to say. Gradually, I started to scrutinise everything else about my appearance, too.

It wasn't until I was 19 that I realised my behaviour wasn't normal. Until then, I'd thought everybody else felt the same way I did – after all, everyone moans about how they look, right? I went to the doctors, but after six months of counselling for anxiety and depression, I was still struggling. That's when I was diagnosed with body dysmorphic disorder, or BDD. This meant that I despised my



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appearance. I'd look in the mirror and see only faults, nothing good. I thought my smile made my eyes wonky, my cheeks were fat, my nose was big and my ears stuck out. Imagine the negative thoughts you have about yourself and times them by 20. That's how I felt every day.

Feeling trapped

I wanted to change everything about how I looked. I'd see pictures of celebrities and research the cosmetic surgeries they'd had – thankfully I never went through with any of it. At home, I'd put make-up on just to go downstairs. I'd pore over old photos and use editing apps to see how I *could* look. In school, I'd spend most of the day in the toilets putting on make-up.

I was also obsessed with losing weight. A year before I was diagnosed,

I joined a slimming group. One day, a man tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You need to put *on* weight, not lose it," suggesting I was too slim to be there. It sent me into a meltdown. It made me swing the opposite way and I started binge eating.

I felt trapped inside my own head and couldn't escape the negative thoughts about my appearance. I'd try to explain to friends but they'd brush me off and try to reassure me. My partner, who I've been with for four years, used to blame himself, thinking he was making me unhappy – but he understands now.

Letting positivity in

After being diagnosed, I had cognitive behavioural therapy for five months. The therapist also created a survey, asking people questions about my appearance. The positive feedback helped me to understand that my self-hating thoughts were all in my head. No one else looked at me and thought the terrible things that I did. At first I was shocked, but then I felt relieved.

I'm still not fully recovered but when negative thoughts creep in, I know how to deal with them. I write blog posts and discuss my experiences on my YouTube channel. Before I was diagnosed, I hadn't even heard of body dysmorphia, so I hope that by spreading awareness I can help others. *For advice on body dysmorphic disorder, call Mind on 0300 123 3393 (9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday); Mind.org.uk*

CARLY'S TOP 3 COPING MECHANISMS

- When I see pictures of celebrities or influencers looking beautiful, I repeat to myself, "They're pretty, but it doesn't mean that I'm not."
- If my head's getting a bit full, I use colouring books to distract myself and destress.
- I listen to motivational speeches in the morning when I'm getting ready. My favourite YouTube channel is the Law Of Attraction Coaching.