

Personality Disorders by Clusters A, B, and C

There are four core features that are common to all personality disorders. They are: distorted thinking, problematic emotional response, over-or-under-regulated impulse control, and interpersonal difficulties. In order to be diagnosed with a specific personality disorder, a person must meet the minimum number of criteria established for that disorder. To meet the diagnostic requirements for a psychiatric disorder, the symptoms must cause functional impairment and/or subjective distress which mean the symptoms are distressing to the person with the disorder and/or the symptoms make it difficult for them to function well in society. Personality disorders can be grouped into three clusters based on similarities within each cluster. These clusters are:

Cluster A (the "odd, eccentric" cluster);

Cluster B (the "dramatic, emotional, erratic" cluster); and,

Cluster C (the "anxious, fearful" cluster)

Cluster A includes *Paranoid Personality Disorder, Schizoid Personality Disorder, and Schizotypal Personality Disorders*. The common features of the personality disorders in this cluster are social awkwardness and social withdrawal. These disorders are dominated by distorted thinking.

Paranoid Personality Disorder: This disorder is characterized by a pervasive distrust and suspiciousness of others. This usually begins in early adulthood and is more common in males. The cause of this disorder is unknown, but believed to be based on biological and genetic factors, social factors such as how their interactions were with others as they were developing, and psychological factors such as their personality and temperament as it was shaped by their environment and how they learned to deal with stress.

In order to be diagnosed with this disorder, four or more of the following criteria must be present-

- The person will believe others are using, lying to, or harming them, without apparent evidence
- They will have doubts about the loyalty and trustworthiness of others
- They will not confide in others due to the belief that their confidence will be betrayed
- They will interpret ambiguous or benign remarks as hurtful or threatening
- They persistently bears grudges (i.e., is unforgiving of insults, injuries, or slights)
- In the absence of objective evidence, they believe their reputation or character are being assailed by others, and will retaliate in some manner
- They will be jealous and suspicious without cause that intimate partners are being unfaithful

Psychotherapy is the recommended treatment for Paranoid Personality Disorder. However, individuals with the disorder rarely present themselves for treatment as they consider others to be the problem. Rapport-building between the individual and therapist is much more difficult than usual because of trust and paranoia issues.

Schizoid Personality Disorder: This disorder is characterized by a long-standing pattern of detachment from social relationships. A person with this disorder has difficulty showing emotions, is seen as a loner, and doesn't seek out or enjoy close relationships. People with this disorder function best in a work role where they are isolated and work alone. The disorder is seen more in men and its onset is usually in early adulthood. Researchers don't know the cause of schizoid personality disorder, but theories suggest that genetic, biological, social, and environmental factors play a role. It is possible that this condition can be inherited from relatives who had this disorder or schizophrenia as these two disorders are seen as related.

In order to be diagnosed with this disorder, four or more of the following criteria must be present-

- The person neither wants nor likes close relationships, including family
- The person constantly picks introverted activities
- The person has little, if any, thought of engaging in any sexual experiences
- The person seldom derives enjoyment from any activity
- The person lacks close friends or confidants other than immediate relatives
- The person appears apathetic to the admiration or disapproval of others
- The person shows emotional coldness, detachment, or flattened affect (dull, bland or inattentive)

Psychotherapy maybe helpful to some patients with schizoid personality disorder as long as their lack of emotional awareness is understood and they are given the space needed. Group therapy may help as all members are practicing new interpersonal skills and the group can provide a support structure and increase social motivation.

Schizotypal Personality Disorder: This disorder is characterized by someone who has great difficulty in establishing and maintaining close relationships with others. People with the disorder are extremely uncomfortable in social situations and they tend to be socially isolated, reserved, and distant. They demonstrate eccentric behavior and have odd or superstitious beliefs, such as a preoccupation with paranormal phenomena that are inconsistent with cultural norms.

In order to be diagnosed with this disorder, five or more of the following criteria must be present-

- Ideas of reference (the person thinks that things completely disconnected from him are influencing him or sending him messages, ex. the government or media)
- Odd beliefs or magical thinking that influences behavior
- Unusual experiences of reality (hallucinations, delusions)
- Odd thinking and speech (vague, overelaborate, metaphorical)
- Suspicious and paranoid
- Inappropriate or constricted affect (the individual appears cold and aloof)
- Behavior or appearance that is odd, peculiar, or eccentric
- Poor rapport with others, lack of close friends except immediate family
- Extensive social anxiety that doesn't diminish with familiarity, usually due to paranoid fears rather than negative perceptions about self