

COMPLEX EMOTIONAL NEEDS

(Including Personality Disorders)

Complex Emotional Needs (CEN) is an umbrella term referring to “personality disorders”, or to any pattern of thinking, feeling, behaving or relating to others which is very different from the “average” person and causes difficulty in “normal” functioning. CENs often have their roots in a disruption to normal human development in the early years of life. This may be the consequence of genetic and/or environmental factors and/or exposure to trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); this results in persistent distress and deeply ingrained and enduring and inflexible thinking and behavioural patterns. CENs often first become evident in childhood or adolescence and continue into later life.

In terms of diagnosis, Personality Disorders have historically been divided into 3 clusters which are summarized below, together with the typical associated behavioural traits.

CLUSTER A	Odd and Eccentric Behaviour
Paranoid PD	Distrust and suspiciousness in which other’s motives are interpreted as malevolent
Schizoid PD	Detachment from social relationships and a restricted range of emotional expression
Schizotypal PD	Acute discomfort in close relationships, cognitive or perceptual distortions, and eccentric behaviour
CLUSTER B	Over Dramatic and Emotional Behaviour
Borderline PD (Emotionally Unstable PD)	Instability in interpersonal relationships, lack of sense of self and marked impulsivity. Self-harm and suicidal ideation
Antisocial PD	Disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others
Histrionic PD	Excessive emotional outbursts and attention-seeking
Narcissistic PD	Grandiosity, need for admiration and lack of empathy
CLUSTER C	Fearful and Anxious Behaviour
Avoidant PD	Social Inhibition, feelings of inadequacy and hypersensitive to criticism
Dependent PD	Submissive and clinging behaviour; need to be taken care of
Obsessive-Compulsive PD	Preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism and control

In sum, therefore, CENs are likely to result in people experiencing a long-standing and pervasive pattern of emotional and cognitive difficulties which affect the way in which the person relates to others or understands themselves; this can occur across a broad range of personal, social and occupational settings.

CENs are likely to impact, therefore, on a person's ability to build relationships and social networks and may lead to significant problems in occupational performance.. It is also not unusual for an individual with CEN to also experience the impact of other co-morbid mental health disorders (such as depression or anxiety) which can cause not only distress but also pronounced mood swings.

Modern therapeutic treatment pathways involve overcoming, or adapting to, CEN through a focus on individual symptoms (rather than on assumptions resulting from a diagnosis). The aim is to thus empower people with CEN to play a happy, positive and meaningful part within their communities. Indeed, there is now evidence that many trauma-focused psychological therapies (such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) and facilitated Peer Groups), coupled with consistent support, result in many people who have been given a diagnosis making great recoveries despite difficult life experiences. Additionally, anti-psychotic, anti-depressant and anti-convulsant medications can be helpful in modifying associated symptoms.