

## Supporting people living with borderline personality disorder

Emma is 35 years old, divorced and the mother of two young children, Tom aged two and Matilda aged five.

Emma grew up as the third child in a family of four. Her parents were strict and had very high expectations. They sent all their children to private schools, expecting them to be high achievers. Emma struggled from time to time academically, and also found it difficult to maintain long-term friendships. Emma's parents were indifferent to the fact that Emma was easily upset and struggled to make friends. "Stop sulking and just get on with it," her mother would say when Emma tried to talk to her about how she felt. Emma's father was even less responsive and would get angry calling her a stupid girl. There were some occasions when her father would smack her when she was sad, send her to her room and tell her to return when she had a better attitude.

When Emma was a teenager she had a lot of boyfriends. They were the love of her life when she was with them, but when they broke up they were her strongest enemy. Emma often felt alone and would tell her parents and siblings that no one understood her. She spent many hours in her room feeling sad. Emma constantly fought with her parents, especially her mother when her mood swings were extreme. From the age of 15, Emma self-harmed in an effort to relieve the constant pain she felt. When Emma's mother noticed some scarring, she insisted that Emma see the family GP. The GP referred Emma to a psychiatrist, who diagnosed her with bipolar disorder and recommended medication. After 18 months of taking medication, Emma felt that it was not helping and so she stopped taking it.

Twelve months later, Emma visited a new GP and explained that she was always so sad and often had panic attacks. This GP diagnosed her with depression and anxiety and recommended more medication. Emma took the medication on and off over a period of five years. By this time she had met her husband to be, Peter. Emma was enjoying life and their romance was intense and emotional. Despite many ups and downs, in the early stages of their relationship, they decided to marry.

Their daughter Matilda was born soon after they were married. In the first year of Matilda's life, Emma frequently visited the Maternal Child Health Centre as she felt that she was not a good mother. Emma required constant reassurance that she was doing okay. The persistent worry of being a good mother meant that Emma often fought with Peter, and felt that he was always putting her down. "Your worrying is obsessive and is out of control," he would say.

**Mental Health  
Professionals' Network**

Emirates House  
Level 8  
257 Collins Street  
Melbourne  
VIC 3000

**postal**  
PO Box 203  
Flinders Lane  
VIC 8009

**email**  
contactus@mhpn.org.au

**telephone**  
1800 209 031

**www.mhpn.org.au**

When Matilda was two years old, Emma's mood was so low that she contemplated suicide. Peter struggled with Emma's constant and intense mood swings and decided that the right thing to do was to end their marriage. Within six months of separating, Emma met Matt and their relationship progressed quickly. After being together for five months, Emma found herself pregnant with her son Tom.

Throughout her working life and while having children, Emma had a variety of jobs such as being a retail assistant, waitress, pizza delivery driver, ski lift assistant, yacht hostess and a cashier. Currently, Emma is working as an assistant cook at the local pub. Just like the relationships with her partners, Emma finds it hard to keep a job because she usually feels that the people she works with don't like her. The shift work of her current job is putting a strain on her relationship with Matt. Matt has recently told Emma that he cannot stay in the relationship anymore. Emma's mood is so low that she decides to go to the GP for help.