



# COPING IN COVID

ON-BPD Newsletter

## Welcome!

Hello and welcome to the Ottawa Network for Borderline Personality Disorder's inaugural periodic newsletter. We hope to publish an interactive newsletter for you, our members and supporters, as well as the rest of the community. In this first issue, we explore our collective challenge in having to face and adapt to Covid-19. We will consider its effect on our lives, and our mental health. We hope that the experiences, insights, resources, and tools we have gathered from what has emerged through this pandemic will be useful to boost you and your family's resilience and effectiveness in transitioning to our new normal. Looking ahead to future issues, our aim is to create a shared outlet for creativity and validation engaging you-our readers. For this to happen, we invite ideas and content from you. Share your stories of resilience and adaptation: what strategies, resources and tools have worked for you and your families? Share creative pieces such as art, poetry and jokes that have inspired you. We will be delighted to consider including these in future editions.

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## A word from our President...

MICHÈLE LANGLOIS

Welcome to our inaugural newsletter intended to update readers you on ON-BPD's work in service to you, our families[i] and loved ones in our community. It is a privilege to work alongside ON-BPD's passionate and dedicated team of volunteers. Thank you for the valuable work you do and difference you make in our community.

For this first edition, I am delighted to share highlights of our past year's accomplishments and preview our future plans.

These are challenging times for our community as we had had to adapt to our new Covid-19 norm. I am pleased to share that ON-BPD quickly transitioned our programming to virtual in March 2020, training Course Leaders and some families on the use of this new modality mid-course! The team did not skip a beat, also coming together to virtually host two (2) public lectures and a summer series of Family Connections constellation of skills refreshers. Event participants shared their appreciation for the opportunity to learn about "Good Psychiatric Management" of BPD, managing emotions and validation skills, as well as, to stay connected

with their peers. Many thanks the team for your generosity, goodwill, and agility in making these experiences possible for the families we serve.

I am also happy to share the good news that ON-BPD merited another grant in 2020 from the Community Foundation of Ottawa has allowed us to continue building our Course Leader and programming capacity in order to offer more courses, reach and serve more families over the coming years. In fact, their generosity allowed us to train and add 13 new Course Leaders to our roster in July 2020 and an additional five in October 2020. Shout out and appreciation to Community Foundation of Ottawa, as well as to our other sponsors, donors and funders who make it possible for ON-BPD to serve families in our community.

We are also grateful for our alliances with The Royal, Sashbear and the NEA BPD who train, support, and amplify our work; as well as for our relationships with other client and family community-based service organizations and colleagues in the mental health sector: researchers, care providers, clinicians, therapists, social and peer support workers who connect us to families and complement the work that we do.

Although challenging, 2020 has amazed me through witnessing of how our community of caring: Donors, Board Members, distinguished Speakers, Facilitators, Course Leaders, Team Leaders, and Community Mental Health leaders have come together to innovate to ensure continued support for Families in our community.

Looking to the future, ON-BPD's focus will be to recruit and onboard new volunteers, support our new Course Leaders and continue to develop the ON-BPD team to continue delivering quality programming and positive family experiences. At the same time, we will challenge ourselves to be creative and innovative in responding to families needs through new relationships and partnerships with others in the mental health and addictions community.

I hold hope for 2021 and beyond as we are invited to help shape and co-design the future of care and services in our community. I invite you join me and others in our community- lending our voices and hands to make change a reality. To learn more about how you can contribute, email me at [michele@on-bpd.ca](mailto:michele@on-bpd.ca).

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## Adjusting, Learning and Resilience: Peggy's Experience with Family Connections and COVID

NORA JORJANI  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

It is not contentious to say that COVID-19 has had a negative effect on all individuals. A threat to both our physical and mental health, the pandemic has not been something to be taken lightly. However, it seems that we have come to the point where it has become the new

normal, and we are living the way we have learnt to, over the past ten months. Nevertheless, it has been quite a challenge, and we are still learning.

The current situation has had an effect on virtually every aspect of our lives, and the ON-BPD is not immune. Our organization, which is built on in-person Family Connections (FC) courses continues to play a vital role in the local mental health community.

This Fall, I spoke with Peggy Brown, Course Leader, Program Director and sitting Board Member, to get her perspective on the changes that the organization has endured and the endeavours in coordinating and converting FC courses to Zoom in the effort to continue to support the community virtually.

When we sat down to speak (over Zoom of course), at first, I had a nagging feeling that maybe we would not be able to find anything positive to speak about. Peggy began by explaining the initial challenges of converting FC to Zoom. The primary challenge, aside from having to learn how to use this entirely new modality for both Course Leaders and participants, was the issue of participants losing the comfort of speaking freely when the family member/loved one with BPD is also in the household with them. For these reasons, many registrants put their registration on hold until they could meet in person. Registration Intake Coordinator, Maureen Carrigan, noted that those who were willing and able to participate via Zoom, eagerly did so and interestingly, we have not experienced any withdrawals. After Peggy and I spoke about the initial downsides to the Zoom transition, our conversation became lighter. We even laughed about the different “Zoom-isms” that we have all become so familiar with. Now that we have been “zooming” for a while, we have found that looking in the speaker’s eyes, the way one would in person, gives us a more authentic feeling when participating in FC classes and meetings.

Our conversation reflected the reality of the current circumstances: a smattering of light and positivity, without diminishing from the solemnity and difficulty of the situation. It is the conundrum of our new reality. For example, Peggy drew upon another serious concern of converting to Zoom, with the apparent difficulty that there is now for the camaraderie and relationship-building that would come more easily with in-person sessions. This is obviously an important experience to have to give up. When I asked how they compensate for these types of skills, Peggy says they are having to be very aware and in tune with the group. For example, being hyper-aware if someone looks like they have something to add, something that would be more organic in person. Peggy says, “As people get more comfortable with ZOOM, they may be able to start working on the camaraderie.” Peggy noted individuals have been finding comfort in being able to access the classes in the comfort of their own homes. Maybe it is having a pet by their side, or maybe it is the simple comfort of being in your own space. Having these comforts may allow individuals to counter some of the discomfort of converting to the online format. This has also recently been reflected in media, with some students with social anxieties of different age groups who are finding online learning more beneficial due to its convenience, accessibility, and the ability to participate in class from your own home.

At the beginning it was difficult to adjust to the new modality of everything being online, whereas now

most people have become very comfortable and are learning the tricks to make it easier and more comfortable. As Peggy said, “The learning curve was swift”. Before COVID, many would struggle with technology and sometimes, were less likely to use it in the class setting. Whereas now, even those of us who found technology a challenge, have become more ‘tech-savvy’ with practice. “It has largely been a matter of learn-as-you-go; for example, learning to become more aware, if someone is presenting, other people notice so you can be as perceptive as you would be in class. When you ‘share your screen’ it is hard to see reactions, but then maybe we can learn to go back and forth.” As Peggy says, “it’s about getting your own personal style in it, as everyone teaches differently. When you are teaching, your personality leads the way.”

When asked what she will bring with her back into the class, she says, she used to think she was technologically illiterate but now uses slides and will definitely bring that with her. “In a way using more learning modalities ... is good for different types of learners.”

Additionally, the leaders have also had to learn how to use Zoom, and as both leaders and participants grow more comfortable using the platform, the benefits beyond COVID become clear. Increased flexibility and accessibility provide greater possibilities for the future, most explicitly relevant in Ottawa during the winter months.

While in the beginning everyone was feeling the surreal effects and fear of the initial stages of COVID, we have now come to find that it is now our way of being. At the end of the day, this reflects the nature of living through COVID. It is a surreal and scary time, but we endure it, and we find ways to support one another and cope. However, it is by no means easy, and we lean on each other to find our way. As it progressed, our conversation became more uplifting, demonstrating that through the obvious and stark challenges of this time, we have had to persevere and even demonstrate resilience and strength. Peggy’s experience validating and reflecting that of what we have seen from the community, participants, and one another.

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## E-tools and Resource Round Up

E-tools and online resources have become an important part of coping through COVID, in general, and for those who are dealing with their ongoing mental health difficulties. Here are some resources and tools we have found valuable and would like to highlight.

### Mental Health Online

- Wellness Together Portal: This undertaking by the government of Canada came as a way to address accessibility of Mental Health support. If you are interested, our President, Michèle, gave a review of the resource on our website here: <https://on-bpd.ca/en/wellness-together-portal-valuable-resource-families-and-loved-ones>

- The Royal Ottawa’s Family Support page, now in online mode, has multiple resources including Caring for Caregiver’s Family Support Groups on Zoom: <https://www.theroyal.ca/patient-care-information/family-caregivers/family-information-and-support-groups>
- Online Psychology Tools and Print-Outs: [www.psychologytools.com/downloads/cbt-worksheets-and-therapy-resources/](http://www.psychologytools.com/downloads/cbt-worksheets-and-therapy-resources/)

### Watch

- NEABPD Webinars: <https://www.borderlinepersonalitydisorder.org/webinars/#foogallery-251070/i:1>
- Managing Anxiety during a pandemic: A Webcast with McGill Experts [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wUWbsm5HiM&ab\\_channel=McGillUniversity](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wUWbsm5HiM&ab_channel=McGillUniversity)
- Instant Video Rentals about BPD: <https://www.bpdvideo.com/product-category/bpd-video-rentals>

### Read

- Building a Life Worth Living by Marsha Linehan

Below are a few organizations that consistently update and share infographics, newsletters, and articles pertaining to COVID and mental health:

- Mental Health Commission of Canada: <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/English>
- PLEO: <https://www.pleo.on.ca>

Following mental health-related social media accounts serve as reminders to put a positive spin on the current situation. Find accounts that suit you and for a balance between staying mindful and informed, while also bringing positivity and validation.

For ongoing updates and more resources, please visit our website: <https://on-bpd.ca>

## In Memoriam

**John Mohan, 1935 - 2020**

**ON-BPD Founder, Treasurer, and Family Connections® Leader**

John Mohan, one of the founders of ON-BPD and our first Treasurer, passed away on September 24. John was among the four Ottawans who took the Family Connections® training in Armonk, New York, in 2004 and who led the first Family Connections® course in Ottawa later that year. For several years, John was a leader of Family Connections® courses in Ottawa.

In addition, John developed the bylaws that met the requirements of the Canada Revenue Agency for ON-BPD to become a registered



charity in Canada in 2005. He also prepared the applications for the first two grants that ON-BPD received – from Heritage Canada and from the Trillium Foundation, both grants for translation into French of the Family Connections® manual and other documents.

We are most grateful to John for his many years of service to ON-BPD, for his leadership in establishing the organization, for his initiative in spearheading applications for grants, and for his dedication in supporting ON-BPD. We extend our deepest sympathies to his wife, Rita, and to his family for their loss.

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## ON-BPD Membership

The Ottawa Network for Borderline Personality Disorder is a federally incorporated registered charity. Each year the corporation must hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM), usually held in June, to report to its members on its operations and financial status, review the annual financial statements, and elect board members. Members of the corporation are individuals from the community who have purchased a membership, available for \$10.00. If you would like to support our organization, you can become a member by purchasing a membership for \$10.00, which you can pay by cheque or through PayPal. The membership form, mailing address and payment page can be found on our website at this link:

<https://www.on-bpd.ca/en/membership>. Thank you!

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Thank you to the ON-BPD Board of Directors and volunteers for their contributions to this newsletter. Thank you to Michele Langlois, Winston Revie, Juliet Haynes, Stephanie Thibodeau, Danielle Langlois, Li Zhuang, Peggy Brown, Nora Jorjani, Jean Montminy, and Alison Henderson.

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[i]Families includes friends and others our BPD loved one would describe as being in relationship with.