

Bipolar Disorder in Children

What is Bipolar Disorder?

- Does your child have extreme changes in mood?
- Does your child get too excited sometimes?
- Do you notice he or she is very sad at other times?
- Do these changes change how your child acts at school or at home?

Some children and teens with these symptoms may have Bipolar Disorder: a serious mental illness. Children with Bipolar Disorder go through unusual mood changes.

Sometimes they feel very happy and are much more active than usual. This is called mania. And sometimes children with Bipolar Disorder feel very sad and are much less active than usual. This is called depression.

Many children have mood swings as a normal part of growing up. Bipolar symptoms are more powerful and make it hard for a child to do well in school or get along with friends and family members.

The illness can cause unsafe actions. Some young people with Bipolar Disorder may try to harm themselves.

Children and teens with Bipolar Disorder should see a healthcare expert to help learn how to cope with their symptoms and lead successful lives.

With help from a healthcare expert, children and teens with Bipolar Disorder can get better over time.

It helps when doctors, parents and young people work together.

How Can I Help My Child?

Right now, there is no cure for Bipolar Disorder. Doctors often treat children who have the illness in a similar way they treat adults. Treatment can help control symptoms. Treatment works best when all doctor visits are kept, instead of going on and off.

Medicine. Different types of medicine can help. Children react to medicine in different ways, so the type of medicine depends on the child. Some children may need more than one type of medicine because their symptoms are so complex. Sometimes they need to try other types to see which are best for them.

Therapy. Different kinds of psychotherapy, or “talk” therapy, can help children with Bipolar Disorder. Therapy can help children change their behavior and manage their routines. It can also help young people get along better with family and friends. Sometimes therapy involves the family members.

If your child has Bipolar Disorder, here are some basic things you can do:

- Be patient
- Talk with your child, and listen to him or her carefully
- Be understanding about mood changes
- Help your child have fun
- Help your child understand that treatment helps him or her get better
- Talk to your child’s healthcare expert about the symptoms you notice

Take Care of Yourself

Taking care of a child or teen with Bipolar Disorder can be stressful for you too. You have to cope with the mood swings and other problems, such as short tempers and unsafe actions. This can be a challenge for any parent.

Sometimes the stress can strain your relationships with other people, and you may miss work or lose free time.

If you are taking care of a child with Bipolar Disorder, take care of yourself too. If you keep your stress level down you will do a better job. This will help your child get better too.

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