



HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD DIAGNOSED WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER

Bipolar disorder is a more serious mood condition that sometimes occurs in children. Children and teens with bipolar disorder may have unusual shifts in mood, energy, and activity levels, ranging from emotional lows (depression) to emotional highs (mania).

Pediatric bipolar disorder is manageable with the right treatment and support.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255, 24/7/365

Crisis Text Line: Text Got5 to 741741, 24/7/365

Let this guide offer you tips to better understand the behaviors related to bipolar disorder. This is not a substitute for professional help, but we hope it helps you best support your child at home.

1. Talk about it. Remember that bipolar disorder should be explained at home in a way that your child can understand. This means thinking about your child's age and developmental level.

- [Define depression and mania:](#) Mania and depression aren't words that all children know. Help them to understand what these words mean.
- Younger children tend to be very self-involved in how they see the world around them. Because of this, they may think that having bipolar disorder is their fault. Help them to understand that bipolar disorder is a disease—just like heart disease or diabetes. It's not anyone's fault, and it's not something to be ashamed of.
- Teenagers tend to think what's happening in the moment will always be the way things are. They may think that their bipolar disorder will never go away and they will never feel better. Help them to understand that bipolar disorder is treatable and does in fact get better.
- Ask children of all ages if they have questions about bipolar disorder and let them know there are other children who have the same disorder.
- Brothers and sisters often worry when a sibling has bipolar disorder. Make sure to talk with everyone in your family about the disorder and changes they may see in their sibling. Talking about it and answering questions will help to ease their worries.
- Make it part of your normal family routine to talk about all kinds of feelings, both positive or negative – even feelings they think you wouldn't be comfortable hearing, like thoughts of suicide. By making it part of a routine to talk about all kinds of feelings, your child is more likely to come to you when they are struggling with something.
- If you or a family member has experienced bipolar disorder and had a positive treatment outcome, this can be helpful to share with your child. Remember to keep the focus on your child and what they are going through. Knowing about someone who has also experienced bipolar disorder— whether a family member or a celebrity – may help some children to know that they can get better.

- 2. Make sleep a priority for your child.** Getting enough sleep is very important for recovery from bipolar disorder. If your child has poor sleep patterns, it could also be a symptom of their disorder - so it's important to be patient and give things time to even out. You can help by encouraging regular bedtimes and waking times.
- 3. Support positive self-esteem.** Many children with bipolar disorder may feel bad about themselves. Lack of self-esteem is a common symptom of depression, and the way some people react to a child's manic symptoms can cause feelings of disapproval. Use praise freely but sincerely. Children who struggle with bipolar disorder will benefit from encouragement.
- 4. Involve your child's school.** Many parents worry that sharing their child's diagnosis of bipolar disorder with the school will stigmatize their child. But schools can help provide the best resources and accommodations. Let the school know about your child's bipolar disorder and brainstorm with teachers and other school officials. Working together can keep your child engaged in school during an episode of depression or mania, which can improve self-esteem and academic performance. Accommodations as simple as permission to lay down in the nurse's office or meet with a school counselor can be really helpful.
- 5. Encourage socialization.** Children with bipolar disorder can often feel isolated or that other children won't understand their mood changes, and so don't want to reach out to others about what they are experiencing. But social interactions are important for recovery from bipolar disorder. Plan social events that include your child.
 - For younger children, try to arrange shorter play dates. Limiting the time helps your child from becoming overwhelmed.
 - For older children, encourage them to join a club or another school activity they enjoy. This can help to foster social interactions if the teen is able to motivate themselves enough to attend.Research, together, [a support group](#) for youth with depression in your area.
- 6. Talk about medication.** Bipolar disorder is often treated with a combination of medications and therapy. Ask your child if they have questions about any medications to be taken. Learn about the medications together. Talk about the possible side effects too. This will help your child to understand what to expect and it may help them better explain their bipolar disorder and treatment to friends.
- 7. Take care of yourself.** It can be overwhelming to support a child with bipolar disorder. You are a great parent for learning how to help. But remember, all parents need a break. It's important to find time to take care of yourself. Use the activities and supports that will help you to recharge your batteries.
- 8. You are not alone.** Just as your child is not alone in this, neither are you. Look for a [support group in your area](#) to connect with other parents/caregivers who are experiencing similar situations with their children.

Bipolar disorder is treatable. It helps to stay open and honest about emotions within your family. Stay connected to your child's primary care doctor and make sure your child feels comfortable being open with them, too.

Need more information on Pediatric Bipolar Disorder, including signs and symptoms?
<http://bit.ly/PTEACH-Family>

Interested in learning more about the different treatment methods for pediatric bipolar disorder?
<http://bitly.com/OMH-Bipolar>

Special thanks to the Project TEACH Parent Advisor Group, who helped to develop this handout.