

Bipolar Disorder in Children and Teenagers

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Bipolar Disorder in Children and Teens

I feel like I'm a snow globe and someone shook me up and now every little piece of me is falling back randomly and nothing is ending up where it used to be.

Does your child go through intense mood changes? Does he or she display extreme behavior changes? Do other people like neighbors teachers, parents of their friends, etc. say that your child is too excited or too moody? Do you as parents noticed that he or she has much more highs and lows compared to other children? It is affecting the normal functioning of your child in school or at home?

If the answer to these questions is yes, your child might **bipolar disorder**, which is a serious mental illness.



What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a serious brain illness and known with other names such as manic-depression, manic – depressive episode. Children who suffer from bipolar disorder often display

unusual mood changes. At times they are very happy and are much more energetic and active than usual than other kids their age (Manic Episode). Other times, these children feel very sad and are much less active than usual (Depressive Episode).

Bipolar disorder is not the same as the normal ups and downs every kid goes through. Bipolar symptoms are more powerful than that. The mood changes are very extreme and often come along with changes in sleep, energy levels, and the ability to think clearly.

Bipolar symptoms are so strong that they affect the child in all possible way like in school or outside school. There are difficulties in getting along with friends and family members. Some adolescents and teens have tried to hurt themselves or attempt suicide.

Children and teens with bipolar disorder diagnosis should get treatment, because of which they can manage their symptoms and lead successful lives.

Who develops bipolar disorder?

Anyone can develop bipolar disorder and generally people start getting symptoms in their late teen or early adult years. This illness usually lasts a lifetime.

Why does someone develop bipolar disorder?

Researchers and Doctors have been trying to find the answer to this question on why someone has bipolar disorder. There could be several factors which may contribute to the illness. Family gene since Bipolar runs in families. Another factor that may lead to bipolar disorder is the brain structure or the brain function of the person with the disorder.

What are the symptoms of bipolar disorder?

Bipolar “mood episodes” include unusual mood changes along with unusual sleep habits, activity levels, thoughts, or behavior. In a child, these mood and activity changes must be very different from their usual behavior and from the behavior of other children. A person with bipolar disorder may have manic episodes, depressive episodes, or “mixed” episodes.

Children and teens having a manic episode may show following symptoms:

- Feel very happy or act silly in a way that’s unusual for them and for other people their age
- Have a very short temper
- Talk really fast about a lot of different things
- Have trouble sleeping but not feel tired
- Have trouble staying focused

Children and teens having a depressive episode may:

- Feel very sad
- Complain about pain a lot, such as stomachaches and headaches
- Sleep too little or too much
- Feel guilty and worthless
- Eat too little or too much

Can children and teens with bipolar have some additional disorders?

Young people with bipolar disorder can manifest many problems at the same time. Some of them are:

- Substance abuse – Both Alcohol and Drugs or any other substance
- Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Anxiety disorders, like separation anxiety.

Remember to watch for any signs of suicidal thinking. Take these signs seriously and call your child's doctor.

Treatment options for Bipolar Disorder

Right now, there is no cure for bipolar disorder and all the treatment options are targeted to reducing effects of symptoms. Regular and steady treatment works better than irregular treatment which has frequent starts and stops. Some treatment options are:

- **Medication.** There are several types of medication available and right type depends individually on the child. Since the symptoms are complex, it might be required to give different type of medicines at the same time. The core is to “start low and go slow.” Remember about the side effects of the medicines and tell your doctor if you see any such effects.
- **Therapy.** Different kinds of psychotherapy or talk therapy can help children with bipolar disorder.

How can I help my child or teen?

Help begins with the right diagnosis and treatment. If you think your child may have bipolar disorder, make an appointment with your family doctor to talk about the symptoms you notice.

If your child has bipolar disorder, here are some basic things you can do:

- Be patient.
- Encourage your child to talk, and listen to your child carefully.
- Be understanding about mood episodes.
- Help your child have fun.
- Help your child understand that treatment can make life better.