



COULD MY PARENT BE

BIPOLAR



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Family Foundation

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WHERE?

In Print : [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Online : [TeenMentalHealth.org](https://www.teenmentalhealth.org)

INTRODUCTION

Having a parent with Bipolar Disorder can be frightening, frustrating, and stressful. When someone you care about has a mental illness, you can feel helpless and wonder if it's your fault. You are not to blame. There is nothing you could have done to cause your parent's Bipolar Disorder. Although it may feel like everything is out of your control, try not to lose hope. Bipolar Disorder can be treated and there are people who can help you and your parent recover. You are not alone!

This book will help you understand more about Bipolar Disorder and what you can do to cope with your parent's illness.





FACTS ABOUT BIPOLAR DISORDERS

NORMAL MOOD CHANGES VS. ABNORMAL MOOD CHANGES

Everyone experiences changes in their moods. For most people, these changes are relatively minor and follow specific events (e.g., feeling sad after a break-up or happy after a good grade). For someone with Bipolar Disorder, these mood shifts are much more dramatic and often occur without any known cause.

People with Bipolar Disorder cycle between periods of Mania (i.e., feeling really elevated or irritable) and periods of either normal mood or Depression (i.e., feeling really sad and low). These mood changes typically last for weeks (for Mania) or months (for Depression).

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT BIPOLAR DISORDER?

- ◆ Bipolar Disorder affects one in every 100 Canadians. [Canadian Mental Health Association. (2009). CMHA: Ottawa.]
 - ◆ Bipolar Disorder typically begins in late adolescence or early adulthood. [Canadian Mental Health Association. (2009). CMHA: Ottawa.]
 - ◆ Bipolar Disorder occurs just as often in men as women. [Canadian Mental Health Association. (2009). "Anxiety Disorders". CMHA: Ottawa.]
 - ◆ Without continuous treatment, 9 in 10 people with Bipolar Disorder will keep having manic and depressive episodes. [Goodwin FK, Jamison KR. (2007). Course and outcome. In: Manic-Depressive Illness—Bipolar Disorders and Recurrent Depression. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 119–154.]
 - ◆ People with Bipolar Disorder are at higher risk of suicide than the general population. [Public Health Agency of Canada. (2002). "What Should I Know about Bipolar Disorder (Manic-Depression)?"]. PHAC: Ottawa.]
-

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It's really important for someone with Bipolar Disorder to stick to the treatment plan recommended by his or her doctor. Some people with Bipolar Disorder stop taking their medication when they start to feel better, not realizing that the medication is the reason they feel better. When people with Bipolar Disorder stop taking their medication, they are very likely to have another manic or depressive episode. At this point, Bipolar Disorder does not have a cure but with continuous treatment, your parent can still live a happy and successful life.



WHAT IS MANIA?

Mania (or a manic episode) is a period of time when your parent's mood is extremely elevated, euphoric, or irritable, and he or she is much more active and energetic than normal. On top of that, your parent may also:

- ◆ feel really confident, like he or she can do anything (even if impossible)
- ◆ feel like he or she doesn't need to sleep (e.g., feel rested after only a couple of hours of sleep)
- ◆ feel super talkative, like there's a buildup of words inside him or her that need to get out
- ◆ feel like his or her thoughts are racing and jumping from one idea to another really quickly
- ◆ feel easily distracted by small and unimportant details
- ◆ feel motivated to move around and get things done, often without accomplishing goals
- ◆ feel like nothing can go wrong, even when he or she does really risky things, like having poor judgment, using drugs, speeding, or blowing large amounts of money

Sometimes people in a manic episode don't realize there is a problem and may even like the excitement and feelings they experience. Unfortunately, manic episodes can get much worse if not properly treated and can hurt your parent's judgment and ability to think rationally to the point where he or she may do something very irresponsible or even dangerous. Some people with Mania can become psychotic and lose touch with reality.



WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

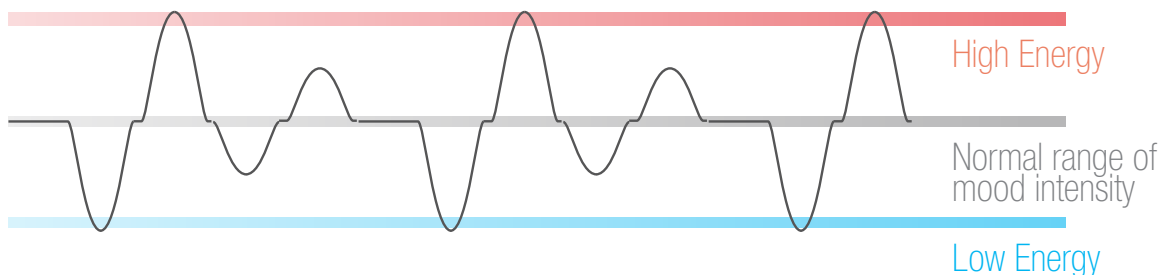
Depression (or a depressive episode) is a period of time when your parent's mood is really sad and low. He or she may also:

- ◆ lose interest in the things that he or she used to like to do
- ◆ eat much less than normal or much more than normal
- ◆ sleep much less than normal or much more than normal
- ◆ move restlessly or barely move at all
- ◆ feel really tired and lack energy
- ◆ lose feelings of pleasure or enjoyment
- ◆ feel worthless, hopeless, or guilty (without a good reason)
- ◆ have trouble concentrating or making decisions
- ◆ have thoughts of death and dying, including suicidal thoughts and plans
- ◆ attempt suicide

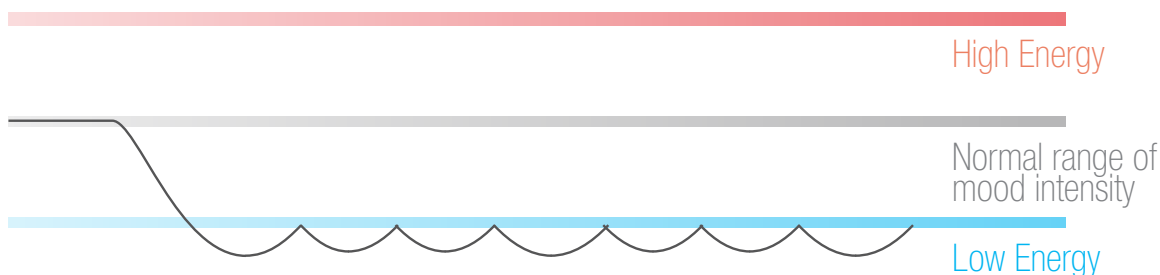
Everyone feels sad or has a bad day occasionally but when someone has a depressive episode, his or her sad feelings last for long periods of time, often to a point where the person feels hopeless and can't function.

RANGE OF MOODS

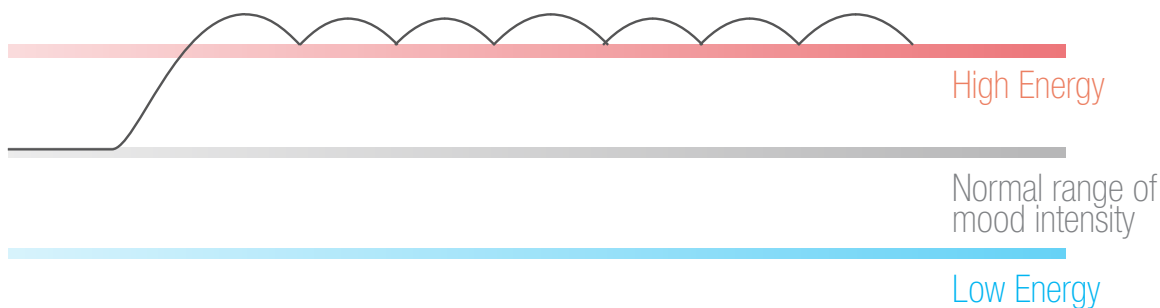
WHAT DOES A NORMAL RANGE OF MOODS LOOK LIKE?



WHAT DOES A MOOD LOOK LIKE WHEN IT SHIFTS TOWARDS DEPRESSION?



WHAT DOES A MOOD LOOK LIKE WHEN IT SHIFTS TOWARDS MANIA?



HOW DO YOU KNOW IF SOMEONE HAS A BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Bipolar Disorders are diagnosed by a mental health professional (e.g., a doctor, psychologist, or clinical nurse practitioner with training in mental health) when someone has a number of specific symptoms. There are different types of Bipolar Disorder and each type of Bipolar Disorder requires different criteria in order to be diagnosed.

1 Bipolar I Disorder

A person with Bipolar I Disorder has experienced episodes of Mania and episodes of either Depression or normal mood. These episodes can last for days, weeks, or even months. Severe episodes of Mania or Depression may require hospitalization for the person to get better or to protect them from the negative consequences of the illness.

2 Bipolar II Disorder

A person with Bipolar II Disorder has experienced episodes of Hypomania and episodes of Depression. Hypomania is a less severe form of Mania. Hypomanic episodes can be very distressing to family members and others but they do not usually require hospitalization and they may not cause significant impairment in the person's relationships or ability to work.

3 Cyclothymic Disorder

A person with Cyclothymic Disorder switches back and forth between periods of hypomanic symptoms and periods of depressive symptoms. The person's symptoms are not severe enough to be considered a manic or a depressive episode, but they still cause a lot of distress or impairment. These mood swings last for at least 2 years, and usually much longer.

WHAT CAUSES BIPOLAR DISORDERS?

The causes of Bipolar Disorder are complex and include genetics and environmental factors. If your parent has Bipolar Disorder, you have a higher risk of developing the disorder yourself. But being at increased risk does not mean that you will develop Bipolar Disorder. In fact, many children of parents who have Bipolar Disorder will not develop the illness. See page 17 for more information.

CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS

When a person is at the height of a manic episode, he or she can sometimes lose touch with reality, which is called psychosis. This means that he or she might hallucinate (hear, see, feel, smell, taste) things that other people cannot) or become delusional (believe very strongly in something that everyone else knows not to be true, and is not culturally- or age-appropriate). People with Bipolar Disorder may also develop Substance Abuse problems (e.g., alcohol or drugs). Substance Abuse is described in more detail on page 24.

TREATING BIPOLAR DISORDERS

Bipolar Disorder is treatable but it takes time and work. Your parent won't get better overnight. There is no set time for how long treatment will last, but most treatments take at least 12 weeks to see noticeable improvements, so it's important to be patient and supportive. Your parent will need to be in treatment for a long time and will need to continue to take his or her medication properly to prevent relapse. A relapse is when an illness comes back after it has been effectively treated. Bipolar Disorder does not have a cure, but it can be managed very well with the right medication and therapy.

Well-established treatments for Bipolar Disorders include certain medications and some types of psychotherapies (i.e., talking therapies). Often a combination of medication and psychotherapy will be prescribed together.

TYPE OF TREATMENT

1 Medication

Medication helps to regulate your parent's mood by helping your parent's brain function better. There are a number of different medications that his or her doctor might choose to prescribe, including:

- ◆ **Mood stabilizers:** which treat both your parent's manic and depressive symptoms.
- ◆ **Antidepressants:** which can be used to treat depressive symptoms in certain people but are not right for everyone.
- ◆ **Anti-psychotic medications:** which treat both mood and psychotic symptoms.

Medications usually take 4-6 weeks to start working, although it may take longer to find out which medication works best for your parent. Once your parent and his or her doctor find the treatment that works best, it is really important for your parent to take his or her medications as prescribed. Even though he or she might feel better, medication is an important part of his or her care. If your parent stops taking his or her medication, his or her symptoms will come back.



2 Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is talk therapy that can be done one-on-one (just your parent and the therapist) or in a group (with other adults who also have Bipolar Disorder). It can be a helpful add-on to medication for some people by helping them to deal with the consequences of having Bipolar Disorder. Some treatments used in psychotherapy include:

- ◆ **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT):** CBT helps people learn to problem solve and change their challenging thoughts and behaviours.
- ◆ **Family-Focused Therapy:** This therapy helps family members understand Bipolar Disorder and learn coping strategies.
- ◆ **Psychoeducation:** This is usually done in a group and is helpful in teaching people to recognize their symptoms so they can seek treatment when needed and help prevent relapses.
- ◆ **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT):** IPT helps the person deal with his or her relationship problems and build stronger social support.

3 Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

ECT is used only if other treatments don't work. It involves sending a small electric current through the brain, which causes a small seizure within the brain. This helps the brain to work better and lessens symptoms of Bipolar Disorder.

For important information on how to get the best treatment, check out:
teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/evidence-based-medicine/
teenmentalhealth.org/images/resources/communicating_with_healthcare_providers_person_version.pdf

WHAT YOU CAN DO?

Start by putting yourself first. Do things that you enjoy and that help you cope with stress. When you look after yourself, it makes it easier to deal with the challenges of your parent's Bipolar Disorder. Don't forget that you're the kid in this relationship - it's not your responsibility to look after your parent. Putting yourself first does not mean that you're abandoning your parent or that you don't love him or her. Here are some ways that you can help your parent, without making his or her Bipolar Disorder your responsibility:

1 Educate yourself about the illness.

Understanding what Bipolar Disorder is and how it affects your parent will help you feel less frustrated and more supportive. Page 30 has a list of helpful websites that can be trusted.

2 Talk to someone.

Talking to other family members about your parent's Bipolar Disorder can be a relief because they often understand what you're going through. Just remember that not all people will have the same experience as you and not everyone is comfortable talking about mental illness. If you can't find support within your family, it's okay to talk to a trusted friend. Try to respect your parent's privacy (and consider asking your parent how he or she feels about you sharing that he or she has a mental illness) but remember that you have nothing to be ashamed of. Some people may be judgmental or unkind. This is usually because they don't understand Bipolar Disorder or what it's like to have a family member who has Bipolar Disorder. Your parent's illness is not a reflection of you and does not make your family less than any other family. You can choose to react negatively to these people; you can choose to ignore the things they say; or you can choose to stand up to them and increase their awareness of mental illness. It's up to you. As important as it is to try to increase people's understanding of mental illness, not everyone is willing to listen. Pick and choose your battles and try to confide only in people you trust. There's no shame in just ignoring someone's negative comments if it doesn't seem worth your energy.

3 Be prepared for emergencies.

It's tempting to pretend that everything is fine but it's so important for you to be prepared in case something goes wrong. Have a plan about what to do and where to go, as well as a list of emergency contacts, just in case. Use the tear out pages at the back of this book to write down your emergency contacts.

4 Learn how to communicate.

Try to avoid arguments and accusations when you get frustrated. Page 14 has some tips for communicating with your parents.

5 Let your parent know you care.
Having a parent with Bipolar Disorder can be really frustrating and upsetting. It's easy to focus only on the negative, especially when your parent's actions start to affect your life. Remember that he or she is still your parent and show him or her you care when you can.

6 Be patient and don't take it personally.
Bipolar Disorder affects the way your parent sees the world. He or she may not want to do the things he or she used to like to do and it may be hard for your parent to attend or participate in your school events or games. If your parent is in a manic episode, he or she might do things that embarrass you. Although it's difficult, try not to take it personally. Be patient with your parent when you can and recognize that the Bipolar Disorder is making him or her act this way. It's not a reflection of how he or she feels about you.

7 Keep in mind quality, not quantity.
Sometimes it's better to spend shorter periods of time with your parent doing something enjoyable when he or she is feeling good, rather than giving up lots of your time trying to care for him or her. It's okay to set boundaries; it doesn't make you a bad kid.

8 Understand your feelings.
Become familiar with how your parent's illness affects you. Do you worry too much or feel neglected? Talking to a counselor, or a trusted friend or family member can help you sort through your thoughts. Keeping a journal of your feelings can also help you put things in perspective and understand yourself better.

9 Accept what you can't control.
You can't control your parent's behaviour or the fact that he or she has Bipolar Disorder. People can only control their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. Trying to change your parent is frustrating and futile. Focus on the things you can control (like your reactions to your parent's behaviour) and try to let the other things go.

10 Appreciate the fun times.
Remember that your parent's symptoms may come and go. Take advantage of the good times and have fun with your parents. Try not to hold a grudge because of how they acted when they were in a manic or depressive episode. It's important to have fun together when you can, because having good times to remember will help get you through the difficult times.

11 Do what you love.
Doing things you love to do can take your mind off problems with your family and remind you of the good things in your life.



TALKING TO YOUR PARENT

When your parent has Bipolar Disorder, it can feel like you're walking on eggshells around him or her. It can be hard to find the right thing to say or to figure out how to tell your parent what's on your mind. Here are a few tips to help you out:

- 1 Be respectful and polite.** This can be a challenge if your parent is experiencing a manic or depressive episode, or has missed out on something that he or she promised you they would do. Try taking a deep breath and remember that Bipolar Disorder is making him or her act this way and you don't have to get swept up in your parent's mood swings.

2 Think of your parent as a person and talk to them the way you would want someone to talk to you. It's easy to think of our parents only as parents or only as someone with a mental illness. They're more than either of those roles and treating them as such goes a long way.

3 Avoid blaming. Even if your parent was at fault, blaming them for whatever has happened will only make him or her defensive and less likely to listen. Use "I" statements whenever you can. They communicate your message without causing the other person to feel as defensive. For example, instead of saying "You missed my soccer game again," say "I was hurt when I realized that you weren't at my soccer game." This puts the emphasis on how it made you feel, instead of what your parent did wrong.

4 Express your feelings. Even though your parent has Bipolar Disorder, he or she is still your parent. Your feelings matter just as much as his or her feelings. Tell your parent when you're upset, stressed out, scared, and even happy. Expressing those feelings will help improve your mood and it's important that your parent is aware of how you're feeling.

5 Choose a suitable time and place to talk to your parent if the topic is sensitive. If you have something important to discuss, make sure that you have some privacy. The middle of the grocery store is probably not a great spot for an intimate or emotional conversation. Try to approach your parent at times when they are generally feeling calm and positive. It will make it easier for both of you. Avoid having a serious conversation with your parent if he or she is in a manic or depressive episode, feeling sick, or using alcohol/drugs.

6 Speak with a trusted adult first. If you have to discuss something serious with your parent, whether it's about you or about his or her Bipolar Disorder, it can help to speak with a trusted adult first. This can mean another family member, a family friend, or a counselor. You can run things by the trusted adult as a trial run and he or she can even accompany you to talk to your parent, if you feel that's appropriate and helpful.

7 Be prepared for denial and negativity. Your parent may not be ready or willing to admit that he or she has a problem. This denial could be because he or she is trying to protect you or it could be that your parent doesn't want to believe that he or she might have a mental illness.

8 If you are not comfortable speaking to your parent face-to-face, writing a letter can be a good alternative. A letter allows you to express how you feel without your emotions confusing you. It also gives your parent the opportunity to read it on their own time. Giving them some time to process what you needed to say allows them to be less defensive than they may be if they were confronted in person. A good idea when writing a letter is to put it away for a day after you've finished writing, and then read it again to make sure you've said what you really wanted to say.

It is not your job to take care of your parent. This information is meant to help you better understand your parent's illness so you can know what to expect and be better prepared to cope. Your job is to take care of you and do your part in trying to have a good relationship with your parent.

QUESTION
& ANSWER



Q Am I betraying my parent if I talk about them?

A No, it's important for you to talk about how your parent's Bipolar Disorder is affecting you. Just make sure that the person you talk to is someone that you trust (and if possible, someone that your parent also trusts). Remember that you have nothing to be ashamed of.

Q Did I cause my parent's Bipolar Disorder?

A No, absolutely not. Nothing you could do would cause your parent's Bipolar Disorder. Bipolar Disorder is a medical illness of the brain, just like diabetes is a medical illness of the pancreas.

Q Does my parent even like me?

A Sometimes people with mental illness don't have the ability to put themselves in another person's shoes and realize how their words and actions affect other people. Mania and Depression skew your parent's judgment and sometimes make it hard for him or her to understand how something he or she says or does might make you feel. Remember that even though your parent has Bipolar Disorder, it is never okay for him or her to say rude or hurtful things to you. Although it can be really tough, try not to take what your parent says personally. If conversations become very negative, do what you can to remove yourself from the situation.

Q Will I get Bipolar Disorder too?

A You get your genes from your biological parents, and although your genes contribute to Bipolar Disorder, that does not mean that you will get the disorder. This means that although it's possible that you will develop Bipolar Disorder, there's also a possibility that you won't. There are many things you can do to stay healthy and perhaps even decrease your risk of developing Bipolar Disorder. Look after yourself, eat healthy, get plenty of sleep, and learn and use positive coping skills (see page 20). Practicing healthy behaviours and coping positively with stress is really important.



DEALING WITH YOUR EMOTIONS

GUILT

When someone you love has Bipolar Disorder, it's not unusual to experience guilt about feeling:

- ◆ Happy
- ◆ Carefree
- ◆ Angry with your parent
- ◆ Like you don't want to spend time with your parent
- ◆ Like you can't make your parent better

Although it's totally normal to feel guilty, remember that your parent's illness is not your fault. You haven't done anything to cause his or her Bipolar Disorder and you have every right to feel and express happiness, anger, sadness, fear, or any other emotion. Try to remind yourself that you can't control or change your parent's emotions, thoughts, or behaviour. He or she has to do that on his or her own. Be caring and thoughtful, but put yourself first. Just because Bipolar Disorder is trying to control your parent's life, doesn't mean you have to let it control yours.

ANGER

Anger is an important emotion. It's totally okay to feel angry at times. Rather than feeling guilty about your anger, try to focus on ways that you can better manage it. You can learn to better understand what your anger means to you and you can even learn how to be more in charge of your anger. Effective anger management takes practice. Here are some tips that may help:

1 Burn off some steam.

Exercise is a great way to manage your anger. Go for a run, try yoga, take a kickboxing class – whatever works best for you. Working out helps your body “release” emotions, plus you get the benefits of exercise.

2 Breathe deeply.

Take a minute and try the box breathing exercise on page 19. Taking deep breaths slows your heart rate and helps you calm down.

3 Learn to problem solve.

Figuring out what exactly is making you angry can make a huge difference in how you feel. Often, what we think we're angry about and what we're actually angry about are not the same thing. Later on, when you have some distance from the situation, think about the point when you got angry, what happened, and what thoughts were going through your head. Understanding the problem goes a long way towards finding a good solution.

4 Give yourself a break.

If you feel yourself getting angry, walk away from the situation for a little while, if you can. This works in a similar way as counting to ten, giving you time to calm down and think rationally about how to deal with the situation that is making you angry.

5 Count to ten.

It sounds cliché but it can help. Taking a pause before you respond helps your body and your mind calm down and you can then think more rationally about how to react.

6 Express your feelings.

Sometimes, telling someone why you are angry can help you feel better. Instead of being aggressive, try to calmly and assertively express your feelings. When you're calm, it's easier for people to listen to what you are actually saying, instead of only reacting to your anger.

If you've tried all of these tips and are still having a hard time managing your anger, it is a good idea to talk to a counselor. For information on how and where to find support, see page 29.

DEALING WITH YOUR STRESS

Having a parent with Bipolar Disorder can be really stressful and that stress can show itself in many ways:

1 Physical symptoms.

Headache; neck ache; indigestion; stomach ache; sweaty palms; racing heart; irregular sleeping patterns.

2 Emotional symptoms.

Crying; anger; loneliness; forgetfulness; diminished sense of humour; irritability; hopelessness; unhappiness; indecisiveness; sensitivity; anxiety

3 Behavioural symptoms.

Drinking, smoking or using drugs; needing to be in control; withdrawal or avoidance; acting aggressively; feeling restless; grinding teeth; eating poorly; having nightmares.

Although a little bit of stress is healthy, the stress of having a parent with Bipolar Disorder can at times feel overwhelming. The coping strategies below can help you stay calm and prevent the stress from taking over your life. If after a little practice, these strategies don't seem to be helping, it's a good idea to talk to a counselor. See page 29 for information on how to find support.

COPING STRATEGIES

1 Exercise.

Daily physical activity improves your health and mood, and helps you get rid of stress. Even something as simple as going for a walk can help.

2 Eat healthy.

Eating a balanced diet gives your body the fuel it needs to help combat stress. Try not to skip meals, eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, and go easy on the junk food.

3 Limit caffeine.

Caffeine can make your heart race, which can make you feel worse.

4 Sleep.

Getting 8-9 hours of sleep each night will help you feel better the next day. If you have trouble sleeping, try the Sleep tips on next page.

5 Daily relaxation time.

Take time each day to relax. Read a book, watch a movie, play a game, listen to music – whatever helps you relax. Also learn and use the Box Breathing exercise on the next page.

6 Build healthy relationships.

It's important to have a good support network of people you trust.

7 Be realistic.
Bipolar Disorder can affect your parent's judgment, making them interpret things as much better or much worse than they actually are. Remind yourself that your parent's perspective may be skewed and evaluate things for yourself before passing judgment.

8 Acknowledge your feelings.
It's okay to feel angry or upset once in a while. You don't have to bottle up your feelings. Try talking to the people in your support network. Sharing your feelings with someone else can feel like a weight is lifted off your chest.

9 Accept what you can't change.
Not being able to change your parent's behaviour can be really frustrating. It's important to remember that the only thing you can control is your own behaviour. Try not to dwell on the things you can't change and focus on the things you can (e.g., your reactions to other people's behaviour).

10 Stay away from alcohol and drugs.
Although you may feel better in the short-term, alcohol and drugs will not resolve your stress. They'll only give you a false sense of confidence and may make your problems worse in the long run. This includes cigarettes!

11 Go outside.
Staying inside all the time can be really draining. Getting outside and enjoying the sun and fresh air can improve your mood. Try to link this with exercise if you can, even a brisk walk outdoors may help.

12 Manage your time.
Learn how to schedule and prioritize your projects and other responsibilities — it will help you feel more in control, more productive, and less overwhelmed. Use a timetable organizer and check it out every morning to help you plan your day.

BOX BREATHING

If possible, sit and close your eyes. If not, just focus on your breathing.

- ◆ Inhale your breath (preferably through your nose) for 4 seconds.
- ◆ Hold your breath for 4 more seconds. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.
- ◆ Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.
- ◆ Pause for 4 seconds (without speaking) before breathing in again.

Repeat this process as many times as necessary. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel calmer and more in control.

SLEEP TIPS

- ◆ Go to sleep and wake up within 30 minutes of the same time every day.
- ◆ Follow a regular nightly routine before you go to bed. A series of steps that you follow every night cues your body that it's time to fall asleep.
- ◆ Don't read, do homework, or text your friends from your bed. This teaches your body that when you're in bed, you should be sleeping.
- ◆ Avoid electronic screens (TV, computer, phone, tablet, etc.) for at least one hour before bed, and try not to bring them into your bedroom.

For more information about sleep, check out: teenmentalhealth.org/understanding-mental-health/sleep





FAMILY RULES

You might have unspoken “rules” in your family. It’s important to be aware of these hidden “rules” because sometimes they’re unhealthy. Here are some rules that may be worth breaking:

1 Don’t trust. When you’re frequently disappointed by broken promises, eventually you learn not to trust what people say to you. Sometimes you don’t trust other people at all.

Break it! We make our assumptions about the world based on our experiences – that can make it easy to not trust anyone else when you come from a family that constantly breaks your trust. Not everyone will disappoint you. There are lots of honest and trustworthy people in the world. Give someone a chance to be there for you when you need it.

2 Don’t feel. When you’re constantly disappointed and hurt by someone you love, you learn to shut off your emotions so that other people can’t hurt you the same way.

Break it! Although it’s tempting to sometimes not feel at all, emotions are an essential part of living a fulfilling and rewarding life. Don’t let your parent’s illness stop you from living the full life you deserve.

3 Don’t talk. When a lot of negative things happen in a family, you can learn not to talk about your problems because it’s uncomfortable.

Break it! It may be uncomfortable at first, but it’s so important to talk about what’s going on in your family. Chances are – someone else feels the way you do. Sharing your feelings with each other can help to release stress and starts you on the path toward resolving family issues. You can’t solve a problem if no one will admit it exists.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Sometimes people with Bipolar Disorder turn to drugs or alcohol to try to control their symptoms. This usually only helps for a very short period of time, as their symptoms reappear when the substance wears off. It also can be quite dangerous as some people may build up tolerance when they use alcohol and drugs often. This means that they need more and more of the substance to get the same effect. If someone is frequently using drugs or alcohol to cope with his or her emotions, they are at risk for substance use problems (also called alcohol or drug addiction). This includes cigarettes! Addiction can cause family problems, social problems, financial problems, and health problems, including:

- ◆ Neglecting, hurting, and losing family and friends because they spend so much time using or trying to obtain the substance.
- ◆ Engaging in moody, unstable, or violent behaviour, often accompanied by anger management problems.
- ◆ Trouble keeping a job because they show up late, are hung over, or even use the substance at work.
- ◆ Spending a lot of money on the substance and sometimes failing to pay necessary bills and expenses (e.g., electricity, groceries).
- ◆ Behaving in dangerous or risky ways. People with addictions can go to great lengths to get a hold of the substance and may put themselves or others in danger.
- ◆ Incurring a number of health problems, including problems with the stomach, heart, liver, and central nervous system.



SIGNS

OF DRUG OVERDOSE & ALCOHOL POISONING

SIGNS OF DRUG OVERDOSE

- ◆ Loss of consciousness
 - ◆ Chest pain
 - ◆ Heavy sweating
 - ◆ Seeing, hearing, or feeling things that aren't there
 - ◆ Losing touch with what's real and what's not real
 - ◆ Faster breathing
 - ◆ Seizures or uncontrollable twitching
 - ◆ Fever
 - ◆ Racing or irregular heartbeat
 - ◆ Cold or pale skin
-

SIGNS OF ALCOHOL POISONING

- ◆ Loss of consciousness
 - ◆ Slow or irregular heart beat
 - ◆ Vomiting
 - ◆ Seizure
 - ◆ Low body temperature
 - ◆ Pale or bluish skin
-

CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY

Someone with alcohol poisoning or a drug overdose may get brain damage or die. It is essential that you call for help immediately if you notice any of the signs listed above.

SUICIDE

Although your parent has Bipolar Disorder, he or she is not necessarily suicidal. Many people with Bipolar Disorder do not have suicidal thoughts and never attempt suicide. However, having Bipolar Disorder does increase the risk for suicide so you should be aware of the warning signs that your parent may be considering suicide, just in case:

- ◆ Intense hopelessness or sadness
 - ◆ Preoccupation with death
 - ◆ Loss of interest in regular activities
 - ◆ Withdrawal from family and friends
 - ◆ Talking about what it will be like when they're gone
 - ◆ Giving away valued possessions
-

WHAT CAN I DO?

It's okay to ask your parent if they are suicidal and tell them that you are concerned. Asking about suicide will not put the idea in his or her head. If you suspect your parent is suicidal, the best thing you can do is tell a trusted adult. If there is no one you trust, call 911. Suicide risk is serious and you cannot handle this on your own.

Knowing your parent is suicidal may cause you to feel extremely anxious, sad, angry, or guilty. Talking to a counselor about what you are going through can be really helpful. See page 27 for help getting support.

WHY WOULD SOMEONE WANT TO DIE BY SUICIDE?

There are many reasons why someone might attempt suicide, including:

- ◆ To escape from problems that may seem overwhelming
- ◆ To end painful feelings of sadness, rejection, or loss
- ◆ To avoid disappointing others
- ◆ To stop feelings of shame and guilt
- ◆ Because they feel worthless and hopeless about the future
- ◆ Because alcohol or drugs have altered their thinking and mood
- ◆ Because they feel that life isn't worth living
- ◆ Because they believe that others would be better off without them

People who die by suicide usually believe that it is the only way out. Their thinking is clouded and they are not able to realize how their actions will affect the people who care about them. Treatment of the mental disorder decreases risk for suicide.



GETTING SUPPORT

Surrounding yourself with a good support system of friends, relatives, neighbours, and other people you trust is really helpful. A good support system will:

- ◆ Understand the challenges that having a parent with a mental disorder creates for you
 - ◆ Listen to you when you need someone to talk to
 - ◆ Notice when you're not acting/feeling like yourself
 - ◆ Give you honest and helpful advice when you need it
 - ◆ Encourage you
 - ◆ Help you cope when you're having a rough time
 - ◆ Be there for you when you need them
 - ◆ Remind you that you're not alone
 - ◆ Hang out with you.
-

1 Find a safe environment.

If you feel unsafe at home - it's okay to go to a friend's house. Just make sure that a trusted adult knows where you are. Don't run away and put yourself in danger.

2 Join a support group for families.

Many communities have support groups for mental illness where you can talk openly about what you are going through. Some communities have groups that are specifically for family members. If there are no local groups, there are also online groups for families affected by mental illness.

3 Talk to a counselor.

If you have a school counselor, it may be helpful to talk to them. They can often provide information on Bipolar Disorder or tell you about other local resources or support groups for families.

4 Know emergency contacts.

If your parent gets abusive or out of control, it's important to know the phone numbers of trusted people you can call for help.

EMERGENCY CONTACT

NAME: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

VIOLENCE:

If your parent becomes violent or if you are unsure about your safety or the safety of others, you need to act. Call 911. If violence is occurring, it is important that you get help from a counselor, police officer, or doctor. **DO NOT WAIT!** The sooner the issue is addressed, the better the outcome.

MAKE A ULYSSES AGREEMENT

A Ulysses agreement is like a safety plan for your family. The purpose of this agreement is to make sure that you and your siblings will be taken care of if your parent's illness gets to the point that your parent is not able to take healthy control of his/her life. It's a good idea to sit down with your entire family and come up with a list of warning signs that your parent's illness may be worsening and what you should do if that happens. The agreement should also include who you should contact and a safe place you could go if your parent is unwell. It would also be a good idea for your family to include trusted relatives or close family friends when creating this agreement, so that they know what could happen and how to provide support if necessary. There is a sample Ulysses agreement in the back of this book for you to use.



INFO

These are places you can find more information about mental health/mental disorders and get help:

1 Family Doctor.

Talk to your family doctor about your concerns. Your doctor can answer questions you may have and may be able to connect you with a good psychologist, counselor, and/or support group.

2 Kids Help Phone.

The Kids Help Phone has counselors who answer phone calls and online questions from young people 24/7. You can reach them at 1-800-668-6868 or at kidshelpphone.ca

3 School Counselor or Nurse.

Your school counselor or nurse may have helpful resources for you, including books, pamphlets, and contacts in the community.

4 Phonebook.

The yellow pages have lists of local support groups, counselors, and youth health centres, some of which may be helpful for you.

5 Health Boards.

Many communities have a health board with information on different support groups and other resources. They are often located in community centres, malls, and grocery stores.

6 Emergency.

If you or your parent are feeling suicidal or are in crisis, go to your local hospital's emergency room immediately.

7 Library.

Check your local community or school library for books to help you understand more about Bipolar Disorder.

8 Internet.

The internet has loads of information about mental illness; just know that not all of it is accurate. In fact, the information on some websites is more wrong than right. The next page has a list of helpful websites that can be trusted.

TALK TO A COUNSELOR OR FAMILY DOCTOR

Sometimes you may need to talk to someone who is experienced in helping teens, like a counselor, psychologist, or doctor. Don't be afraid to ask for this if you need it. Realizing you need more help and looking for it is a sign of strength, not weakness. A counselor or doctor can help you:

- ◆ Understand more about your parent's mental illness
- ◆ Understand and express your emotions in a positive way
- ◆ Learn to cope in healthy ways
- ◆ Make positive changes in your own life
- ◆ Build healthy relationships
- ◆ Set limits and protect yourself

Sometimes it helps to make a list of questions before visiting a counselor or doctor. Remember, what you say will remain confidential unless you are in a situation where harm can happen to you. Discuss with your doctor or counselor how they will keep your discussions in confidence.



HELPFUL WEBSITES

Teen Mental Health: www.teenmentalhealth.org

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre: www.keltymentalhealth.ca

National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

Canadian Mental Health Association: www.cmha.ca

CREST.BD: www.crestbd.ca

Mood Disorders Society of Canada: www.mooddisorderscanada.ca

Mental Health Foundation: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

WRITE ABOUT YOU

Writing in a journal can be a really good way to express your feelings. Reading over what you've written later may help you make sense of your feelings and you might even feel better. Feel free to use the questions below if you're having trouble getting started.

I still have questions about _____

I'm concerned my parent will _____

I'm worried I will _____

I'm going to share my feelings with _____

My friends will help me _____

I'm going to take care of myself by _____

Things that make me feel better include _____

When I am scared, I will _____

I can trust _____

Things I like about myself include _____

I will stay connected to my family by _____

What I love about my family is _____

I get frustrated when _____



EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

My parent's doctor's name: _____

My parent's doctor's phone number: _____

Trusted adult/relative #1: _____

Trusted adult/relative's phone number: _____

Trusted adult/relative #2: _____

Trusted adult/relative's phone number: _____

Police phone number: _____

Crisis hotline: _____

Closest hospital phone number: _____

If I need to leave and go to a safe environment, I will go: _____

Phone number: _____

Medication my parent is on: _____

**IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR SAFETY OR THE
SAFETY OF SOMEONE ELSE, CALL 911!**



ULYSSES

AGREEMENT

NAMES OF PEOPLE AWARE OF THIS AGREEMENT:

Name			
Signature			
Contact Info			

PARENT'S MEDICAL CONDITION:

Diagnosis			
Symptoms			
Medications (name, dose)			



IF PARENT IS UNWELL, CHILDREN WILL BE TEMPORARILY TAKEN CARE OF BY:

Name			
Relation			
Contact Info			

SPECIFIC NEEDS OF CHILDREN (dates of births, health card number, medical issues):

SPECIFIC CARE CONTACTS FOR CHILDREN INCLUDE:

	Name	Contact Info
Family Doctor		
Dentist		
School		
Friend		

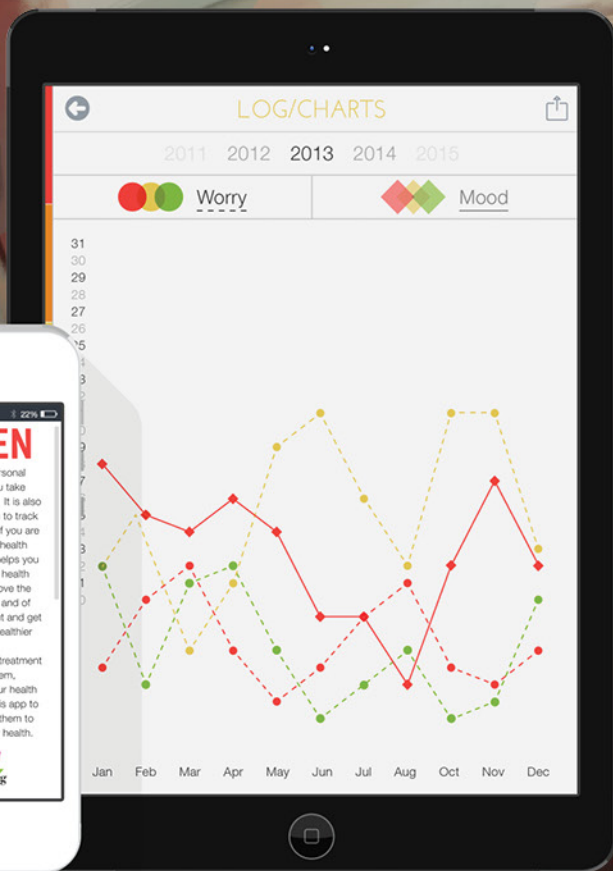
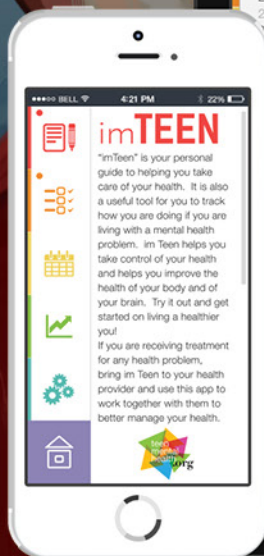


imTEEN

Taking charge of your health



- ASSESSMENT
- CHECKLIST
- CALENDAR
- VISUAL REPORTS



TRANSITIONS



amazon.com

Available on the
App Store

Available on the
iBookstore

Available on Amazon.com and the Apple iBookStore. The App is free for download at the Apple App Store & online: teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/transitions



FAMILY PACK

better mental health for you & your family

Support yourself and your family members in better understanding mental disorders and how to deal with them. If you have a mental disorder, are supporting a family member with one or are interested in how you can support a friend and their family, the Family Pack can help.



ANXIETY DISORDER

DEPRESSION

EATING DISORDER

SCHIZOPHRENIA

DRUG & ALCOHOL ADDICTION

BIPOLAR DISORDER

