<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder/index.shtml>

Living With

If you know someone who has bipolar disorder, it affects you too. The first and most important thing you can do is help him or her get the right diagnosis and treatment. You may need to make the appointment and go with him or her to see the doctor. Encourage your loved one to stay in treatment.

***To help a friend or relative, you can:***

* Offer emotional support, understanding, patience, and encouragement
* Learn about bipolar disorder so you can understand what your friend or relative is experiencing
* Talk to your friend or relative and listen carefully
* Listen to feelings your friend or relative expresses and be understanding about situations that may trigger bipolar symptoms
* Invite your friend or relative out for positive distractions, such as walks, outings, and other activities
* Remind your friend or relative that, with time and treatment, he or she can get better.

Never ignore comments from your friend or relative about harming himself or herself. Always report such comments to his or her therapist or doctor.

***How can caregivers find support?***

Like other serious illnesses, bipolar disorder can be difficult for spouses, family members, friends, and other caregivers. Relatives and friends often have to cope with the person's serious behavioral problems, such as wild spending sprees during mania, extreme withdrawal during depression, or poor work or school performance. These behaviors can have lasting consequences.

Caregivers usually take care of the medical needs of their loved ones. But caregivers have to deal with how this affects their own health as well. Caregivers' stress may lead to missed work or lost free time, strained relationships with people who may not understand the situation, and physical and mental exhaustion.

It can be very hard to cope with a loved one's bipolar symptoms. One study shows that if a caregiver is under a lot of stress, his or her loved one has more trouble following the treatment plan, which increases the chance for a major bipolar episode. If you are a caregiver of someone with bipolar disorder, it is important that you also make time to take care of yourself.

***How can I help myself if I have bipolar disorder?***

It may be very hard to take that first step to help yourself. It may take time, but you can get better with treatment. To help yourself:

* Talk to your doctor about treatment options and progress.
* Keep a regular routine, such as going to sleep at the same time every night and eating meals at the same time every day.
* Try hard to get enough sleep.
* Stay on your medication.
* Learn about warning signs signaling a shift into depression or mania.
* Expect your symptoms to improve gradually, not immediately.

***Where can I go for help?***

If you are unsure where to go for help, ask your family doctor. Others who can help are listed below.

* Mental health specialists, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, or mental health counselors
* Health maintenance organizations
* Community mental health centers
* Hospital psychiatry departments and outpatient clinics
* Mental health programs at universities or medical schools
* State hospital outpatient clinics
* Family services, social agencies, or clergy
* Peer support groups
* Private clinics and facilities
* Employee assistance programs
* Local medical and/or psychiatric societies.

You can also check the phone book under "mental health," "health," "social services," "hotlines," or "physicians" for phone numbers and addresses. An emergency room doctor can also provide temporary help and can tell you where and how to get further help.

***What if I or someone I know is in crisis?***

If you are thinking about harming yourself, or know someone who is, tell someone who can help immediately.

* Call your doctor.
* Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room to get immediate help or ask a friend or family member to help you do these things.
* Call the toll-free, 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255); TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889) to talk to a trained counselor.

Make sure you or the suicidal person is not left alone.

Online group for parents: <http://www.bphope.com/topics/forum/bipolar-support-for-parents-and-parenting/group-parenting-a-dependent-bipolar-young-adult/>

Some good articles: <http://www.bphope.com/support-for-kids-children-teens/>

Parenting a Bipolar Teen

**QUESTION**

**Do you have any advice for parents who are dealing with the challenge of raising a teenager who struggles with depression and bipolar disorder? We've tried everything we can think of to help our daughter, but so far our efforts haven't had much of an impact. Can you offer us some hope?**

**ANSWER**

Don't lose heart. There's nothing wrong with you or your efforts to help your teen. Some children simply have severe psychiatric problems that don't respond to normal parenting techniques. This includes kids who are diagnosed with ADHD, oppositional-defiant disorder, pervasive developmental disorders like autism, and bipolar disorder.

Children who fall into one of these categories need specialized treatment from a qualified mental health professional. Many of them also require medication. They're suffering with disorders that are physiologically based, and as a result they need something more than simple encouragement, discipline, or a good talking-to. That's why parents who have a child with *undiagnosed* ADHD or bipolar disorder often feel frustrated and defeated. That frustration can be compounded when well-meaning friends, relatives, or teachers imply that the child's problems are due to poor parenting. Because the underlying disorder hasn't been identified, these moms and dads often become hopeless and even begin to resent their child.

You're fortunate, then, to know exactly what you're facing. Many parents actually feel as if a heavy weight is lifted from their shoulders when they finally receive an accurate diagnosis of their child's condition. Armed with the knowledge that your daughter is struggling with bipolar disorder, you can pursue the appropriate treatment. In the process, you can also learn some specialized behavioral interventions and incorporate them into your parenting. With the proper medication, your daughter should be able to manage her depressions and mood swings quite well. The result can include a new outlook on life and a new level of efficiency at school, at work, and in her interactions with family and friends.

We suggest you begin by calling Focus on the Family's Counseling Department. Our staff can provide you with a list of family counselors and psychiatrists in your area who specialize in treating adolescent bipolar disorder. Our counselors are available Monday through Friday between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Mountain time at 855-771-HELP (4357). The Family Help Center staff member who answers the phone will arrange for a licensed counselor to call you back. One of them will be in touch just as soon as they're able.

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**This information has been approved by the Physicians Resource Council of Focus on the Family.**