

## Definition of Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder is defined as a very serious brain illness that affects children, teenagers, and adults. The disorder is not usually diagnosed until someone is in their late teens or early adulthood, however there is an increasing prevalence of Bipolar Disorder being diagnosed. This disorder is also called Manic Depression and patients and their families become easily confused by the overload of information that is out there on Bipolar Disorder. Children with Bipolar Disorder have severe and unusual mood changes that are much more severe than what is typically seen in children that have mood swings. A child's mood will change between two distinct periods **Mania** or a manic episode and **Depression** or a depressed episode. Your child may also have a **Mixed** episode, but we will get to this.

The symptoms of a **Manic Episode**, which by definition must last for a period of at least one week, but usually last a little longer are: At least three of the following symptoms are present, four if the mood is only irritable: an inflated self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, more talkative than usual, flight of ideas, distractibility, excessive involvement in pleasurable activities, and an increase in goal-directed activities.

The symptoms of a **Depressive Episode** include five or more of the following symptoms and have been present during a two week period of time and represent a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either a depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure. The symptoms of the depressed episode are: depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, diminished interest or pleasure in almost all activities, significant weight loss, insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day, psychomotor agitation, diminished ability to think or concentrate, feelings of worthlessness, and psychomotor agitation or retardation.

In a **Mixed** episode the criteria are met for both a Manic episode and for a Depressive episode nearly every day for at least a one-week period of time. Children and teenagers seem to have more mixed episodes than adults with the disorder. What you as the parent often see is a change in your child's energy level and extreme changes in their behavior, most often I hear that their child is extremely angry or has "rages".

Only a doctor can diagnose Bipolar Disorder and it is diagnosed using specific diagnostic criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fourth Edition or the (DSM-IV). Bipolar Disorder is usually treated with a combination of medications and psychotherapy and the patient with Bipolar Disorder should receive treatment consistently. Often, I have found that patients with Bipolar Disorder decide to quit taking their medication or quit coming to therapy and they experience a relapse or worsening of their symptoms. Receiving treatment for Bipolar Disorder should NOT be sporadic as the patient may experience severe symptoms ie.. suicidal thoughts.

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