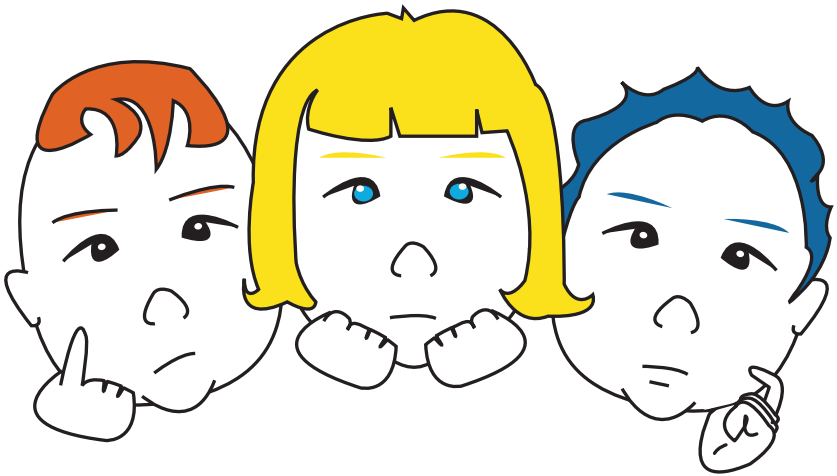


Understanding Mental Illness in Your Family

*When Moods Go
Up and Down*



*For children who
have a parent with
Bipolar Disorder*



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.
BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY

This booklet was adapted from materials developed
by Sabin Sebastian MD, Birmingham, Alabama and the
South Carolina Department of Mental Health.

Made possible in part due to an unrestricted
educational grant from



JANSSEN-ORTHO

"No. Let's go to your house instead."



"I can't understand her, my mom is sometimes so happy that people think she is drunk or something. Then at other times she gets so sad that she doesn't even eat or sleep well."

- Taylor



"It's such a drag! I love softball, and I made the school team. I want dad to come and watch my games. But I am afraid - what if he suddenly becomes like he sometimes does. Why he may decide to coach my team or something like that."

- Megan



"It's hard to say this and I am afraid my friends will find out. But sometimes my dad says strange stuff like he's God or that he is a king and sometimes even hears voices talking to him..."

- Liam

So what's with all these moms and dads? They all suffer from an illness called:

Bipolar Disorder

Pretty big word. Right?

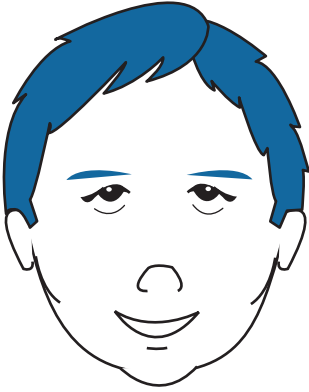
Don't worry! It won't be so hard when you are done reading this. You will even know as much, or even more than some grown-ups!

First let's see what it feels like to have this illness.

Let's say that you are doing OK and then for no reason you feel kind of strange. You begin to feel that you are a rock star - even though you don't know how to hold a guitar and have never sung a song before!

Then things get really wild! You get all these ideas in your head and you can't stop thinking about it. You want everyone to know these things. But people only give you strange looks! It seems alright to you. But not to others. You seem to have so much energy that you don't even need to sleep! You are making plan after plan but you don't have time to finish any of them!

At other times you get very irritable and angry. People don't seem to understand you! Then there are times when things get really bad. You may start hearing voices that others cannot hear or see things they cannot see!



But what makes it worse is that you know deep down that there is another side to this roller coaster ride!

You know that very often, sooner or later, you are going to go through periods when you will feel worthless, useless, sad and miserable. **If it sounds really bad, it is. It is no fun to be ill!**

Now you know what happens in people who have bipolar disorder. It is an illness of the brain. It shows itself by periods of mania and periods of depression.

Mania is when the person is talking too much and having too much energy and thinking they are extra special and sometimes hearing voices and seeing things.

Depression is when they are sad and unhappy for long periods of time, even though there is no reason to be that sad.

Sometimes they can be both depressed and manic at the same time! Sometimes they may start drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs too.

What causes Bipolar Disorder?

You probably know people who have blood sugar problems (diabetes) or blood pressure problems (hypertension). This isn't very different.

In diabetes, a part of your body in the stomach called the pancreas isn't working right. In bipolar disorder, a part of your body in the brain isn't working right.

But there are other things too. To get diabetes, it isn't always that only a part of your body does not work right, but other things also have to go wrong. For instance, eating too many sweets and not getting enough exercise, all go together to worsen the problem.

In the same way, even in bipolar disorder, things like work problems, money problems, etc. can worsen the illness, even though it does not cause it.

Is it your fault? Absolutely NOT!

Sometimes kids wonder whether they did something that made their mom or dad ill. Sometimes their parents or someone else may even say that they caused it (probably when they are in a bad mood). **But hey, kids are not the cause of these illnesses!**

Is there a treatment?

Just like any other illness, there are things to treat bipolar disorder. There are pills that are used to treat this. And they have taken for the persons whole life. But it's better to have to take pills than to fall ill all the time.

But you must remember, that like diabetes, where people have to take treatment for a long time, the same thing is true here also. And some people become ill, get better, fall ill and get better again. Some people have to see the doctor all their lives.

'Talk-treatments' are sometimes done along with medicines. What's that, you must be wondering.

When people become ill, they sometimes have difficulty doing the things they could do before. Talk treatments help people learn better ways of dealing with problems.

Even though it seems like a pretty scary thing to have, there are good treatments for it. As long as they take their medications properly they should do well. By now, I am sure that if you know someone who has bipolar disorder, you also know what they are going through.

Things to know if someone in your family has a mental illness...

It's not your fault. No one can cause another person to have a mental illness.

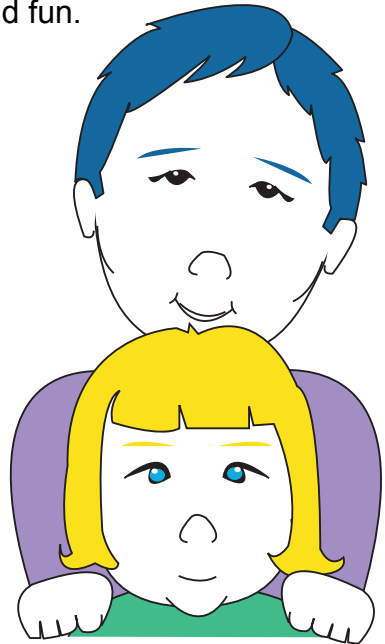
Your feelings are okay. It's okay to feel sad, lonely, angry, or confused. Other kids have those feelings.

Talk to someone you trust. Share your feelings with someone you trust – a grandparent, aunt or uncle, school counsellor, teacher or coach.

Take care of yourself. Get involved in things you enjoy doing. Develop a hobby, get involved in sports, read or do anything you find fun.

It can get better. With medicine and help from doctors, counsellors, family and friends, people with a mental illness do get better.

It's no joke. People should never make fun of mental illness. Ask your teacher, librarian or school counsellor to help you learn more about mental illness.



Remember the three Cs

I can't Cause it

I can't Cure it

I can take Care of myself

Things I Can Do To Help Myself

In an emergency I can call:

If I need someone to talk to I can call:

If I am looking for information I can call:

One person I can go to for help is:

Times when I may need help:

Things I can do to help myself feel better:



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For more information on supporting families with
mental illness, please contact:

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