Bipolar Disorder in Children & Teens

Camber® Mental Health
KVC HEALTH SYSTEMS
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What is Bipolar Disorder?

Everyone, especially youth, experiences frequent or dramatic changes in their mood or energy levels from time-to-time. Feeling a range of emotions is a normal part of life. This can make it very difficult to know if the behaviors a child is displaying are healthy responses to what's going on in their life or something more serious such as bipolar disorder.

Here are some characteristics that someone with bipolar disorder is likely to experience:

- **Depressive symptoms** that last most of the day, every day, for at least two weeks.
- **Manic symptoms** that last most of the day, every day, for four to seven days.
- Mood episodes that cause **serious disruptions to eating, sleeping, schoolwork, home life, and social life** and represent a real change from the child's general level of functioning.
- The problems caused by mood episodes are never limited to only happening at home—**they extend to several other areas of the child's life.**
- The episodes are cyclical, meaning that even though they might go away, **they almost always return.**

Types of Bipolar Disorders

- **Bipolar I Disorder:** A child typically experiences manic episodes that last at least seven days, and/or manic symptoms that are so severe that they need immediate hospital care. Usually, depressive episodes may also occur and typically last at least two weeks. It's also possible for them to experience symptoms of depression and mania at the same time.
- **Bipolar II Disorder:** A child typically experiences a pattern of depressive episodes and manic episodes, but not as severe of manic episodes as someone with Bipolar I Disorder.
- **Cyclothymic Disorder (also called Cyclothymia):** A child may experience periods of manic symptoms as well as periods of depressive symptoms lasting for at least one year. However, the symptoms do not meet the diagnostic requirements for a hypomanic episode and a depressive episode.

Signs & Symptoms

It can be difficult for a child to understand and explain what they are feeling so it's very important for caregivers to pay close attention to behaviors. There are two main symptoms of bipolar disorder—depression and mania. Below is a list of behaviors that may indicate a child or teen is struggling with bipolar disorder.

Depression:

- Expressing feelings of sadness, worthlessness or hopelessness
- Self-harming and/or thoughts of suicide
- Feeling very tired, low energy
- Changes in sleeping habits (such as sleeping too little or too much)
- Eating a lot more and significant weight gain
- Forgetful
- Unable to make decisions
- Unable to complete simple tasks
- Lacking interest in activities they once enjoyed

Mania:

- Feeling a big boost of energy and ambition
- Spending money excessively, buying things they wouldn't typically want
- Unable to sleep or eat
- Speaking very quickly and saying things that do not make sense
- Becoming easily irritated or jumpy
- Experiencing psychosis, where you see or hear things that are not really there
- Acting recklessly, such as drinking alcohol excessively or using drugs

If you're noticing any of these behaviors in a child, help them complete this free, downloadable mental health assessment at info.kvc.org/quick-assessment

Our Network of Locations

KANSAS CITY
4300 Brenner Dr.
Kansas City, KS 66104

OLATHE*
21277 W. 153rd St.
Olathe, KS 66061

WICHITA
1507 W. 21st St. N.
Wichita, KS 67203

HAYS
3000 New Way Blvd.
Hays, KS 67601

WEBSTER GROVES**
400 North Rock Hill Road
Webster Groves, MO 63119

cambermentalhealth.org

*In partnership with Children's Mercy **In partnership with St. Louis Children's

What You Can Do to Help

If you know a child who is struggling with bipolar disorder, here are some ways you can support them:

- **Seek professional help.** It's important to have a physician or licensed mental health professional examine the child for an accurate assessment and diagnosis of their physical and mental health.
- **Encourage them to exercise or do physical activities they enjoy.** Regular exercise can help with depression and promote better sleep.
- **Help them monitor their medication schedule,** if applicable, to ensure they are not missing any doses or taking more than prescribed.
- **Be very calm, patient and gentle with them.** Recovery for bipolar disorder can take a long time and there's no cure. The goal is to find the right fit of ongoing treatment and therapy based on their individual needs and lifestyle.
- **Be observant of their behaviors and help them keep track of when mood changes, depression or mania occur.** Tracking this over time can help identify triggers, what treatment approaches are most effective or any additional concerns.

Contact Camber Mental Health for Support

Camber Mental Health is a network of nonprofit inpatient and residential children's mental health treatment centers serving youth ages 6 to 18. Each year, we give thousands of youth a safe place to heal, build resilience, and overcome struggles with behavioral and mental health challenges. Our compassionate team of psychiatric, medical and behavioral health professionals provides a nurturing and therapeutic experience along with a treatment plan tailored to meet each child's individual needs. The goal of our treatment programs is for each child to safely return home with the resources and supports in place to live a healthy and happy life in their community.

If you're concerned that a child in your care is struggling with bipolar disorder or other mental health needs, **call Camber at 913-890-7468.** We're available 24/7 to answer your questions.

Here's a list of additional resources you can contact for help:

- Call the child's primary care physician or your local community mental health center
- Text HOME to 741741 for 24/7 support from the Crisis Text Line
- Call the National Alliance on Mental Illness helpline at 800-950-6264, which is staffed by volunteers who have mental health conditions
- Call the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 or chat online at 988lifeline.org

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