



Your Child's Mental Health: What to Know About Pediatric Bipolar Disorder

First and most importantly, bipolar disorder is highly treatable. Bipolar disorder in children causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, and activity levels. The dramatic changes in mood range from depressive symptoms (emotional lows) to what is called "mania" (emotional highs). Because of this, it is sometimes referred to as a manic-depressive illness. The behaviors that come with these mood changes can interfere with a child's daily life including school, social life, and healthy development.

The key for parents is to:

- 1) Know what to look for
- 2) Ask your child about what you notice
- 3) Bring any concerns to your pediatrician

WHAT DOES BIPOLAR DISORDER LOOK LIKE IN KIDS?

Kids who suffer from bipolar disorder will have symptoms of clinical depression, and also have periods of extreme agitation. They may react to small frustrations with huge tantrums that can last 30 minutes or more. Tantrums on their own aren't a sign of bipolar disorder, but if you've noticed a change in how your child has tantrums, reach out to your pediatrician. They can help you figure out whether the tantrums are cause for concern, even if they are *not* signs of bipolar disorder.

SIGNS OF MANIA MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Over-ambitious ideas and racing thoughts
- Promiscuous sexual behavior
- Recklessness (risky behaviors)
- Agitated and sometimes incoherent speech and thoughts
- An extreme decreased need for sleep

Of course, times of recklessness and feeling invincible are also part of just being a kid. The issue is whether things get too reckless. You know your child best. Trust your instinct as to whether your child's behavior seems more extreme.

What Should I Do If I Think My Child Has Bipolar Disorder?

If you notice a mix of both depressed mood and extreme agitation, and these behaviors seem different than before, *talk with your pediatrician as the first step*. A simple, "I've noticed some changes in my child's behavior that don't seem typical for him/her," can start the conversation. Your pediatrician can help you to figure out if there's cause for concern. If you happen to know that your child has a close relative with bipolar disorder and you notice any of these changes in behavior, reach out for help right away.

You should also *talk with your child*. You can say something like, "You seem more down lately," or "You seem really on edge, lately. Is everything OK?" Despite what some people think, these kinds of questions do not cause harmful behavior, but they *do* help your child know that you care about them. Let your child know they can talk to you at any time.

Remember, you know your child best. If you notice something different in their behavior, it's completely normal to have concerns. Take that opportunity to learn more by talking to you pediatrician or another trusted health care provider.

To learn more about healthy development and mental health by child age, visit the Project TEACH Parent and Family Page: bit.ly/PTEACH-Family

To learn more about bipolar disorder in children and teens, visit the NY Office of Mental Health website: bit.ly/OMH-Bipolar