

Fast Facts about Bipolar Disorder

Valerie J. Samuel, Ph.D.

What is Bipolar Disorder?

Many children and especially adolescents experience mood swings as a normal part of growing up, but when these behaviors begin to interfere with the ability to function in daily life, bipolar disorder could be the cause. Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depression, is a treatable disorder involving *extreme* changes in mood, thoughts, energy levels and behavior. These mood changes can last for hours, days, or weeks in a child's life.

Manic Symptoms *may* include:

- An expansive or irritable mood
- Excessive involvement in multiple projects and activities
- Impaired judgment, impulsivity, racing thoughts, and pressure to keep talking
- Inappropriate or precocious sexual behavior
- Explosive, lengthy, and often destructive rages
- Grandiose belief in own abilities that defy the laws of logic (ability to fly, for example)

Depression Symptoms *may* include:

- Depression, lethargy
- Defiance of authority
- Sleeping little or, alternatively, sleeping too much
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Loss of appetite

While, the exact causes of bipolar disorder are not known, it is recognized to be a brain based medical illness that may be related to certain chemical imbalances in the brain. The student and their family should be referred to a child psychiatrist to be evaluated and treated for the disorder.

Resources for Further Information about Bipolar Disorder

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

730 N. Franklin, Suite 501

Chicago, IL 60610

(312) 642-0049 or 1-800-NDMDA

<http://ndmda.org>

Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation

A website with information on Bipolar Disorder in Children

<http://www.bpkids.org>