

ABILITY NETWORK FACTSHEET

BIPOLAR DISORDER - BPD



What is it?

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that affects the mood, meaning that a person may experience extreme highs and lows. Formerly known as manic depression, BPD is categorised by two key symptoms of:

- periods of depression – feeling very low, often fatigued and lethargic with very little energy
- periods of mania – feeling very high, overactive, at times on-edge

Unlike typical changes in mood, the symptoms of bipolar tend to last much longer and each extreme may be over a period of days or weeks.



How is it described?

There are two main types of Bipolar (I and II), these are categorised by the frequency and type of episodes experienced:

A diagnosis of bipolar I disorder means you will have had at least 1 episode of mania that lasts longer than 1 week. You may also have periods of depression.

A diagnosis of bipolar II disorder means it is common to have symptoms of depression. You will have had at least 1 period of major depression. And at least 1 period of hypomania instead of mania.



Behaviours / symptoms

Mania

- feeling happy or excited, even if things aren't going well for you,
- being full of new and exciting ideas | moving quickly from one idea to another,
- racing thoughts | talking very quickly | hearing voices that other people can't hear,
- feeling much better about yourself than usual | being easily distracted and struggle to focus
- not being able to sleep, or feel that you don't want to sleep,
- thinking you can do much more than you actually can | make unusual, or big decisions without thinking them through,

Depression

- low mood | having less energy and feeling tired | feeling hopeless or negative,
- feeling guilty, worthless or helpless | being less interested in things you normally like doing,
- difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions | feeling restless or irritable,
- sleeping too much or not being able to sleep | eating less or over eating,



What can you look out for?

Listen non-judgementally to understand from a person what they may be thinking, feeling or experiencing and ask if there is anything you can look out for to help them

Be aware of circumstances, events or triggers for that person and create a supportive plan in the event someone does experience a period of mania or depression.



Challenges people may face

Given that a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder is likely to take up to 9 years, a person may experience significant distress and upset at being misdiagnosed along this journey. It is really important to create a safe, secure and caring space within the working environment so that a person may feel comfortable to share their thoughts and feelings with you. Many people with a diagnosis may have triggers and understanding what these triggers are can help with creating a safe place to work.

Recognising when a person may be being put under pressure and acting quickly to resolve this can also assist.

Challenges faced by people with a diagnosis of Bipolar are likely to vary and it is important to take the time to get to know and understand the person within your team / family / friendship group



How can you support?

Try not to make assumptions about how to best support someone with Bipolar Disorder, but instead ask them what you can do to help. It is important to recognise that every person is different and what is helpful for one person may not be for someone else

Provide support, reassurance, kindness and compassion – asking the person if there are any adjustments you can make, if you can help with workload or if you can support in any other way. Make sure that you create a safe environment for the person to share as much as they feel comfortable and be prepared to listen to understand more.



How many people are impacted?

1.3 million people in the UK have bipolar. That is one in fifty people. Bipolar is one of the UK's commonest long-term conditions with almost as many people living with bipolar as cancer (2.4%), it is more than twice as common as dementia (0.8%), epilepsy (0.8%), autism (0.8%), rheumatoid arthritis (0.7%) and learning disabilities (0.5%).

It takes an average 9 years to get a correct diagnosis of bipolar and there is a misdiagnosis an average of 3.5 times.

Bipolar increases an individual's risk of suicide by up to 20 times.

Where to get
more information

<https://www.bipolaruk.org/>

Mind – [bipolar disorder](#)

NHS – [about bipolar disorder](#)

NHS – [IAPT Self referral](#)

Young Minds - <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/bipolar-disorder/>