

Helping a Friend or Loved one with Bipolar Illness.

Watching a loved one or a friend with bipolar illness isn't easy, especially if you are not the one with the illness or are unaware or uninformed about it. Watching the ups and downs that a friend or family member has is very difficult. Similar to a person who has a physical illness, you can feel helpless and scared at times. Some of the results that occur when a person has an episode are, one; a strain on relationships and two; havoc with all aspects of family living. In addition to those, a family member or friend may have to cope with outbursts and outrageous demands. Usually, the person in the family who picks up the slack when this occurs is the person who has the most patience and the one who has the time to spend with the ill person. There may be light at the end of the tunnel if the person with the illness receives proper help with proper medications and emotional support.

Please remember that, as the caretaker, first take care of yourself before helping a loved one with their problems. It is important to know what bipolar is if you are to help the distressed friend or family member, because if you don't know what to look for, how can you help them? The better equipped you are to handle the problem, the better it will be for you and the person you are looking after.

Encouraging the person to get help, I feel, is the first step in helping the individual. The sooner the person gets help, the sooner the illness can be handled properly. From my own personal experience, I waited years before I got help, and I could have led a better life if I had gotten help sooner.

Having sympathy for your loved one goes a long way. If they know you are there for them, the process for their recovery is hopeful, as opposed to not lending a sympathetic ear at all. It is essential that you have patience with the individual. With my own personal experience, my family was the first and foremost reason why I got the help I needed. Friends were also helpful but were not living with me to fully understand or experience what I was going through. Many times, after an episode, I realized what I had put my family through, which made me realize how badly I needed help. I saw first-hand how my family at times felt helpless, fear and anger because of my actions. My family did realize that my illness wasn't anyone's fault but was a mental illness that I inherited at birth, why and how is relatively unknown. Some say it is heredity and some say there are other factors that contributed to the illness. There are studies that deal with what causes mental illness, but more research is ongoing and necessary to further understand the reasons. Family members having unrealistic outcomes can impede progress and recovery.

You should realize your own limitations. If not, it will cause you to fail, and that was not an option for me. Don't pretend that you can be the caretaker and therapist all in one for your loved one. If you do attempt to go that route, failure will prevail. Be honest with your loved one. Honesty is the best remedy for helping one with Bipolar Illness. Ask he or she how they feel, and it also may be a good idea to let them know how you are feeling. Let them know that they are not alone in their struggles and that you understand that they have a true and serious illness. Give them hope that there will be better days ahead. Emphasize how important they are to you, other members of your family and all who love them. Providing emotional support is important but emphasizing the need for professional help is most important. Don't argue with them if they resist help, just be patient with them. Help them to find a qualified and respected

professional to help guide them to recovery. Set up appointments if necessary, learn about their medications, and alert the doctor of any problems the patient may encounter.

Make a mental note or write down the medications they need to take and when they should take them. I have trained my service dog to alert me when to take them. Previously, I have been remiss in my attempts to be mindful when and what medication I should take. Last, but not least, watch for signs of bipolar relapse. I have given you information on how to manage your loved one with the illness. This is not to say that this is the only remedy and approach to manage your loved one's illness, but the above recommendations have proven to be a life saver for me, personally. Good luck in helping your loved ones in this challenging but hopeful journey.

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