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The International Society for Bipolar Disorders
PO Box 7168
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-0168

Is It Bipolar Disorder or ADHD?

While the symptoms noted here may suggest a bipolar disorder, they may also point to any number of other illnesses that appear similar to bipolar disorder. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has many of the same symptoms as bipolar disorder. In fact, a child can have both disorders at the same time. Please consult a mental health care professional for an accurate assessment.

Other disorders that commonly occur together with bipolar disorder in children and adolescents include *oppositional defiant disorder* and *substance abuse*, respectively.

What To Do Next

Bipolar disorder is treatable, and treatment works. However, there is currently no blood or other laboratory test that will detect the presence of bipolar disorder. In order to make a diagnosis of bipolar illness, a primary care physician must see the child to rule out any medical causes and make appropriate referrals. Referral to a mental health care provider is needed to confirm the diagnosis.

The process of reaching an accurate diagnosis is not simple and will most likely require several doctor visits and a lot of patience on the part of the patient and family. A complete picture of the illness can be seen only by looking at the child's symptoms and behavior over time. While the road to a diagnosis may seem long and may cause frustration, an accurate diagnosis is crucial to choosing the appropriate medication and treatment plan and will ultimately lead to quicker and more effective management of the illness.

Where To Go For More Information:

Books:

Adolescent Depression: A Guide for Parents

by Francis Mark Mondimore, MD

The Life of a Bipolar Child: What Every Parent and Professional Needs to Know

by Trudy Carlson

Brandon and the Bipolar Bear

by Tracy Anglada

Websites:

The International Society for Bipolar Disorders

www.isbd.org

The Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation

www.cabf.org

The Juvenile Bipolar Research Foundation

www.jbrf.org

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists

www.aacap.org

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

www.nami.org

The Bipolar Child

www.bipolarchild.com

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*Juvenile Bipolar
Disorder Series: A
Parent's Guide to
Early Detection*

What is Bipolar Disorder



Bipolar disorder (also known as Manic Depressive Illness) is a psychiatric condition characterized by mood swings, or shifts in mood and behavior, that can be extreme. These emotional shifts go beyond the normal highs and lows typically seen in children and adolescents, and alternate be-

tween two distinct moods: **mania** and **depression**.

It is now known that bipolar disorder occurs in children and adolescents. However, since they are growing and developing, the symptoms they experience may be different from those of adults. Bipolar disorder in youth may look like moodiness and difficult behavior, but it is a serious medical condition caused by complex chemical processes in the brain. Bipolar disorder may also affect the child's thinking, sleep, appetite, sexual drive and energy level. While current studies suggest that as many as 1 out of 100 adolescents have the illness, more studies are needed to give an accurate figure for children.

The Bipolar Spectrum

There are varying degrees of severity of bipolar disorder that occur along a spectrum (see fig. 1 below). We can compare this to the varying range of red and blue hues seen at either end of the color spectrum.

Bipolar I is characterized by recurrent episodes of severe mania and major depression.

Bipolar II is characterized by recurrent, less severe episodes of mania, known as **hypomania**, and major depression.

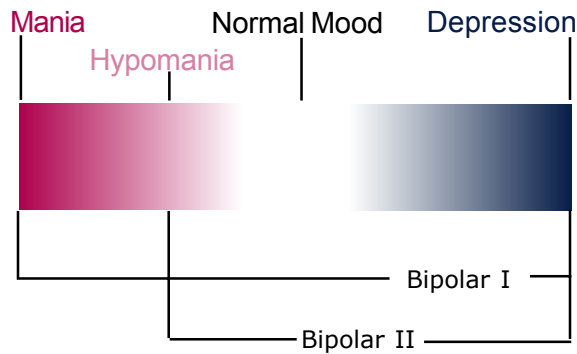


Figure 1. Bipolar Spectrum

The hypomanic symptoms of bipolar II disorder are typically milder than in Bipolar I and may be overlooked or be attributed to a behavior problem. However, the symptoms of depression in both bipolar I and bipolar II disorders can equally negatively interfere with a child's ability to function at school, work or home.

Many children do not meet the full criteria for Bipolar I or II, resulting in a diagnosis of **Bipolar Disorder Not Otherwise Specified**. These children typically experience a shorter duration of manic and depressive symptoms.

Because bipolar disorder is cyclic, the symptoms may look different depending on the child's current mood (mania or depression) within the cycle.

Symptoms of Mania and Depression

Mania is characterized by:

- A decreased need for sleep
- Exaggerated or inappropriate happiness, silliness or giddiness
- Exaggerated optimism that does not match a given situation
- Exaggerated self importance
- Behaving as if he or she were invincible
- Atypical, high energy levels
- Exaggerated talkativeness or fast paced, loud speech
- Racing thoughts
- Extreme restlessness, impulsivity
- Hypersexuality or inappropriate sexual behavior

Several (4) of the symptoms occurring together may indicate an episode of mania.

Depression is characterized by:

- Extended periods of extreme sadness
- Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Lack of motivation
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tiredness
- Aches and pains (including headaches and stomach aches) that are not related to any medical cause
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts

Several (5) of these symptoms occurring together may indicate an episode of depression.

While these symptoms may seem common in children, the likelihood of bipolar disorder increases if:

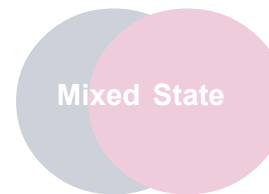
- There is a family history of bipolar disorder, mood disorder, and/or substance abuse
- The symptoms affect the child's functioning
- The symptoms represent a marked departure from the child's typical behavior
- The symptoms cannot be explained by the presence of other psychiatric or medical conditions

The symptoms common to both mania and depression include:

- Changes in sleep patterns (unable to sleep at night / awake in the morning)
- Agitation
- Poor concentration, easily distracted
- Extreme irritability and temper tantrums
- Aggressive behavior against self or others

Extreme episodes of mania and depression are marked by hallucinations (hearing voices or seeing things that are not real) and delusions (false beliefs).

Sometimes mania and depression occur simultaneously in what is known as a **Mixed State**.



In other cases, children and adolescents may alternate very rapidly between mania and depression. These "switches" may occur daily, a condition known as **Rapid Cycling**. Rapid Cycling and Mixed States appear to be the rule rather than the exception in children. In addition, any combination of mania and depression may be seen. For example, multiple episodes of mania may be followed by depression. Both Rapid Cycling and Mixed States are associated with a poorer prognosis and a higher risk of suicide if left untreated.



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The **International Society for Bipolar Disorders (ISBD)** is the recognized forum for international collaboration resulting in education in all aspects of bipolar disorders. ISBD members include patients, families, mental health care professionals and all those with an interest in bipolar disorder.

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