

HELP SHEET: **CONNECTING WITH YOUR LOVED ONE**



BIPOLAR DISORDER: TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

As a caregiver, you know that some of the symptoms of bipolar disorder may make connecting with your loved one difficult. Because your involvement is so important, here are some tips to help make it easier to work together:

Speak slowly and clearly

- Keep sentences short and simple
- Stay focused on one topic at a time
- Avoid getting caught up in an argument or raising your voice
- Be friendly and encouraging

Keep things calm

Experiencing the symptoms of bipolar disorder can be very stressful for your loved one and for you. Here are some helpful ideas:

- Give your loved one the chance to talk when he/she is ready
- Show respect for how he/she describes and interprets symptoms
- Make and stick to routines if you can, like setting times for eating, taking a walk, and going to sleep every day
- Maintain a low-stress, quiet environment and a calm style of communicating

Include your loved one

It's important for all of us to feel productive and have a say in our daily lives. To help your loved one do this,

- Spend time together doing activities unrelated to bipolar disorder such as watching a movie or visiting a park
- Offer choices so your loved one can have a sense of control — even if it's just deciding what's for dinner
- Talk to your loved one about the treatment — and encourage him/her to talk to you and the Treatment Team about how he/she is feeling



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A SAMPLE CONVERSATION

These are the kinds of topics that **loved ones** with bipolar disorder and their **caregivers** may talk about, along with some communication tips that can help. Of course, every relationship and situation is different, so the best way to improve communication between you and your loved one is with the help of your Treatment Team, including your psychiatrist.

Taking medication

SON

"I'm not taking that. It makes me feel bad."

MOTHER

"Let's talk to the doctor. Maybe there is a different medication that would work better for you."

Tip: If a treatment isn't working or is causing unpleasant side effects, encourage your loved one to talk with the Treatment Team. Patients should not stop taking a medication without talking to the doctor first.

Dealing with manic episodes

DAUGHTER

"I'm going to quit school and work and drive across the country... tomorrow!"

MOTHER

"Those are some big plans! Maybe we can take a trip soon. Let's talk about this some more."

Tip: Do your best to prevent your loved one from starting big projects, spending a lot of money, driving long distances, or doing anything dangerous. During stable periods between mood episodes, come up with a plan for how to help your loved one during future manic episodes.

Seeing signs of relapse

Tip: If you see signs of a relapse, acknowledge how your loved one is feeling. Try to be calm and talk about how important it is to reach out to get medical help. Meanwhile, do what you can to help your loved one feel more secure.

SISTER

"Seems like you're experiencing more symptoms lately. Let's talk to the doctor."



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FACING ACUTE EPISODES

During an acute manic or depressive episode, it may be difficult to talk to your loved one. While it's possible to try to prevent acute episodes from coming back quickly by sticking to a treatment plan, they may occur and it's best to be as prepared as possible.

One of the first things to do is call the Treatment Team immediately. Meanwhile, here are a few things to remember:

- Don't take comments personally. Sometimes, people in an acute manic episode may say something they don't mean. If needed, step away from the person and avoid arguing
- Stay as calm as you can. Don't argue or show anger. Don't raise your voice
- Do your best to keep the environment calm. Avoid loud noises, activity, and stimulation
- Ease into conversations slowly. Let your love one talk at his/her own pace, when he/she is ready

REACHING MAINTENANCE

Reaching a Maintenance Phase, when manic and depressive symptoms are very mild or may even disappear completely, is an important goal of treatment. You can help your loved one reach maintenance by encouraging him/her to stick with the treatment plan, which may include both medication and psychotherapy. For example, you can remind your loved one of the benefits of taking medication and how much better he/she feels when symptoms are controlled. Encourage your loved one to speak with a member of the Treatment Team before making any changes to the treatment plan.

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