

# Tips for how to help someone manage bipolar treatment

## *For Family Members and Friends*

Medical professionals often remark on how helpful family members and friends can be in reporting changes in patients' symptoms and ensuring that patients consistently take their prescribed medication.

It also is very important for families to work together in managing treatment, since mood changes and behaviors affect the whole family, and there are many issues involved in treatment. Ways you can work as a team are to:

- **Partner in treatment.** Medications take time to take effect, the dosage may need to be adjusted, and medications often need to be changed. You can help your family member or friend by scheduling and tracking medications, making medical appointments, and reporting changes to the medical professional.
- **Be understanding.** Let your family member or friend continually know that you care. People with bipolar disorder need to be reminded that many people are concerned about them.
- **Learn about bipolar disorder.** The more understanding you have of the symptoms and issues surrounding bipolar disorder, the more you can cope, help, and keep your expectations realistic. Review books, brochures, and videos on a variety of bipolar disorder topics.
- **Share your feelings as a family.** Since bipolar disorder affects the whole family, it is important to share your feelings, both the feelings of the person and the caregivers' feelings. By talking about issues and emotions, you can uncover what works and what is not helpful to one another.
- **Meet or call the person's doctor.** It is very useful for you to meet with the medical professional from time to time, if your family member or friend with bipolar disorder will agree to it. You can gain a good understanding of the condition and discuss issues together. Although there is patient confidentiality, you can call the clinician and report symptoms and behaviors you observe.
- **Focus on behaviors.** If the person is reluctant to seek help, then don't try to convince the person that bipolar disorder is causing the problems. Instead, talk about the person's behaviors and how treatment can help. For example, after you have listened and sympathized with the person's feelings, try to agree on wellness goals (e.g., consistent sleep and feeling less irritable). Then, try to assign some action steps that you can agree on

### **When to seek immediate help**

If at any time your family member or friend talks about death or suicide or may be harmful to you or others, seek immediate help. Contact their doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call the police or a local crisis team.

to reach these goals (e.g., after a week, if the person does not improve, you will set up a medical evaluation).

- **See a family or couples therapist.** Marriages in which a spouse has bipolar disorder have a much higher likelihood of ending in divorce. Couples therapy can help restore relationships by addressing resentful feelings and communications skills.
- **Develop a crisis plan.** Talk to the clinician and family member about what you will do if there is a crisis, under various circumstances, and where you will take the person. Put the plan in writing.
- **Create a support system.** Try not to take on caring for someone all by yourself, because it is a difficult task and can bring you down. Talk to other family members about sharing responsibilities and join a support group to help you cope.

**For more information, contact Families for Depression Awareness, (781) 890-0220**