

Invited to Belong

Bipolar Disorder

Condition:

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that mainly affects people's mood. If a child or young person has bipolar disorder, they are likely to have times where they experience:

- manic or hypomanic episodes (feeling high)
- depressive episodes (feeling low)
- potentially some psychotic symptoms during manic or depressed episodes

You might hear these different experiences referred to as mood states; everyone has variations in their mood, but in bipolar disorder these changes can be very distressing and have a big impact on a person's life. They may feel that their high and low moods are extreme, and that swings in their mood are overwhelming.

Depending on the way they experience these mood states, and how severely they are affected, they may be diagnosed with a particular type of bipolar disorder.

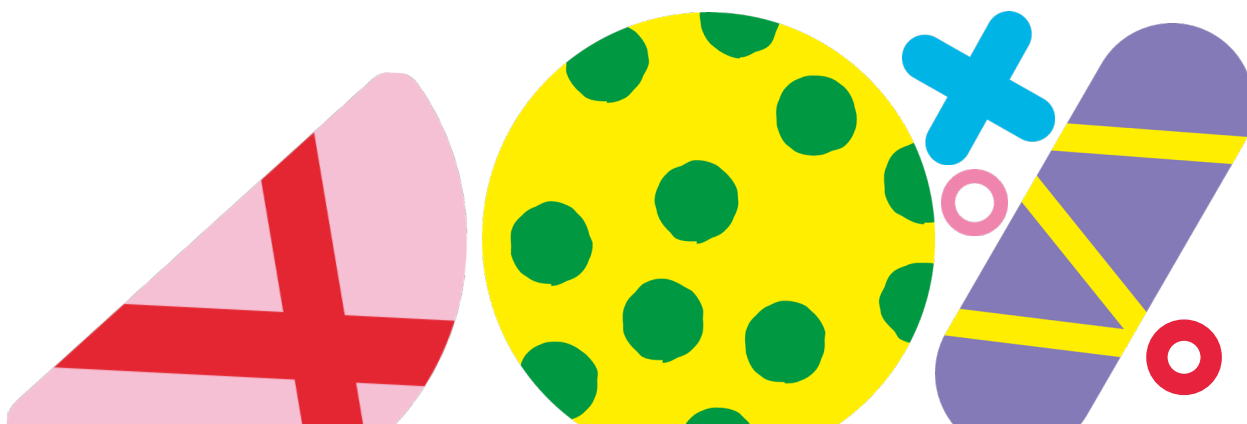
Problem Areas:

When a young person is experiencing a manic episode, they may appear to be:

- happy, euphoric or have a strong sense of wellbeing
- uncontrollably excited, like they can't get their words out fast enough
- irritable and agitated
- have increased sexual energy
- easily distracted, like their thoughts are racing, or they can't concentrate
- very confident or adventurous
- like they are untouchable or can't be harmed
- like they can perform physical and mental tasks better than normal
- like they understand, see, or hear things that other people can't

Consequently, they may:

- be more active than usual
- talk a lot, speaking very quickly, or not making sense to other people





- be very friendly
- say or do things that are inappropriate and out of character
- sleep very little or not at all
- be rude or aggressive
- misuse drugs or alcohol
- spend money excessively or in a way that is unusual
- lose social inhibitions
- take serious risks with their safety

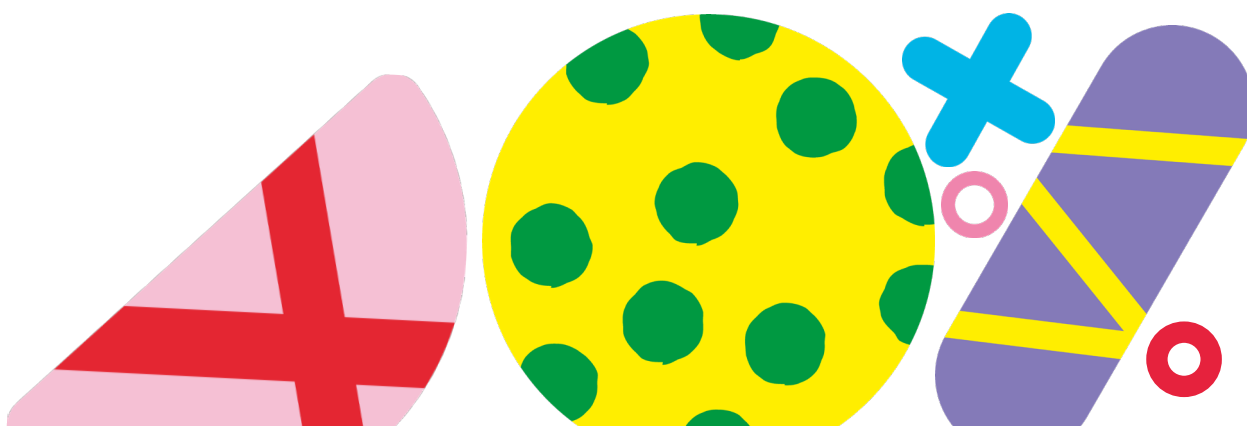
When a young person is experiencing a depressive episode, they may appear to be: down, upset, or tearful

- tired or sluggish
- not being interested in, or finding enjoyment in, things they used to
- low in self-esteem and lacking in confidence
- feeling guilty, worthless, or hopeless
- agitated and tense
- suicidal

Consequently, they may:

- not do things they normally enjoy
- have trouble sleeping, or sleep too much
- eat too little or too much
- misuse drugs or alcohol
- be withdrawn or avoid people
- be less physically active than usual
- be self-harming, or attempting suicide

It is also possible for people to experience 'mixed' episodes when they experience symptoms of depression and mania or hypomania at the same time or quickly one after the other. These 'mixed' episodes can be particularly difficult for a person to deal with as it can be harder to understand and manage their feelings and emotions.





Support strategies for your Group:

- When the young person is feeling well, try talking to them and their family about how you can support them if they have an episode. This can help you all feel more stable and in control of what's happening.
- Discuss behaviour you find challenging, but again only do this when the young person is well. Try not to be judgemental or overly critical; focus on explaining how specific things they've done make you feel, rather than making general statements or accusations about their actions.
- Learn their warning signs and triggers. Most people will have some warning signs that they are about to experience an episode of mania or depression. The best way to learn what these are is to talk to them about these and explore together what they might be. If you have noticed certain behaviours that normally happen before an episode, you can gently let them know.
- It's understandable that you might find yourself constantly on the lookout for signs that a young person is starting a bipolar episode but remember that this might not be the most helpful way to support them. Always keep in mind that it's possible for anyone to have a range of emotions and behaviours while still feeling stable overall. Try not to assume that any change in mood is a sign that someone is unwell. If you're not sure, talking to them is the best way to check.

Further information:

Mind <https://www.mind.org.uk>

Thanks to Mind for much of the material used in writing this article.

'Invited to Belong' has been developed in partnership between Urban Saints and Youthscape.



Youthscape

www.urbansaints.org/invitedtobelong