

How to Help Children and Families Living with Bipolar Disorder

When a child with bipolar disorder takes his life, people pause to mourn a senseless death. They also wonder helplessly if there was anything they could have done to make a difference. Please take a moment to learn how you can help children and families with bipolar disorder.

It is estimated that there are nearly a million young people in the U.S. suffering with bipolar disorder. The condition is highly heritable increasing the likelihood that more than one member of the family will suffer from the illness. Parents of children with this condition are put in some of the most intense parenting circumstances with some of the least support. It is more likely that a family dealing with bipolar disorder will be ostracized than welcomed, more likely that they will be condemned than supported, more likely that they will be treated with disdain than befriended and more likely that they will face a society ignorant of brain disorders than one that understands. Each of us has it in our power to begin changing this sorrowful situation. Nearly every person in America knows an individual with bipolar disorder. Is it your neighbor, classmate, student, workmate, or perhaps your relative? Here are some concrete ways for you to help:

- **Refer families to support.** Families with bipolar disorder need support. They need to connect with other individuals and educate themselves regarding the illness and its treatment, including medication safety. Support can come from organizations such as NAMI (nami.org) and The Balanced Mind Foundation (thebalancedmind.org)
- **Contribute to the cause.** Help end the controversy on how to treat and diagnosis pediatric bipolar disorder. There is little funding and support to make testing and research happen. Medication safety, diagnostic accuracy and research into the genetic underpinnings of the illness are high priorities. Without sufficient funding this research crawls slowly forward. Pediatric bipolar disorder is funded at the level of an orphan illness. Put the Juvenile Bipolar Research Foundation (jbrf.org) on your list of charitable giving. Your donation can make a difference!
- **Become interested and educated.** Learn what bipolar disorder is, how it presents in children, how it can affect their ability to develop and learn, and what medical and psychosocial interventions are necessary. It is difficult to help someone else without a knowledge base of your own. Gone are the days when this is someone else's problem. Read [Questions Kids Have About Pediatric Bipolar Disorder](#)
- **Encourage treatment.** Sometimes we inadvertently discourage treatment by negative remarks and statements about medications, doctors and brain disorders. It may be impossible for parents to appropriately address the needs of their children if their own medical needs are not being cared for.
- **Erase stigma.** Open your heart and mind to embrace families struggling with brain disorders. One caring teacher, friend, or neighbor can mean the world to a family who feels isolated and alone in their daily struggle. Bring a casserole, flowers or write a note to a family living with bipolar disorder. Show them that you understand that brain illnesses are just as devastating as other illnesses of the body. [Take the Bring Change 2 Mind Pledge](#)

While you will never be able to prevent every tragedy or save every life you may just save one. And if each of you reaches out with empathy and understanding the impact will be profound.