

How to Help – Bipolar

These notes are taken from the course notes for 'Understanding How to Help'. Click for further details of the [Understanding Yourself](#) courses.

What is bipolar?

These symptoms used to be known as 'manic depression'. Today they are called 'bipolar disorder'.

The term, 'bipolar disorder' describes symptoms in which a person can go down into deep depression and lethargy and then move to a state of mania in which they feel very high and overactive. The mood swings can last for a considerable time. The depression can be so deep as to produce overwhelming feelings of worthlessness which can lead to thoughts of suicide.

In the manic phase, you can feel very happy, have lots of energy with ambitious plans and ideas. You don't feel like eating or sleeping. There is a real danger of spending far too much money on things you don't need and can't afford. The problem is that you can get so high that you become delusional or psychotic where you see or hear things that aren't there or become convinced of things that aren't true.

But what is it really?

The two people in one house are not comfortable together. They don't help one another and don't get on at all. Usually, it is a case of the extrovert not getting on with his Melancholic. They can't bear to be in each other's space, so they run from each other. There is a distinct lack of 'shalom'.

If his extrovert is Choleric, then his switch from Choleric to Melancholic can be clear and definite. He can be in the depths of depression; realise he can't stay there and quickly move to the Choleric. The need to get away from possible pain and negatives in the Melancholic drives him ever higher into the Choleric, exacerbating all the ingredients in the Choleric as a result.

If his extrovert is Sanguine, the move between the temperaments can seem slower. It is rather like the swing of the pendulum; it hits the stop at one end and rebounds towards the other. However, the need to escape the negatives of the Melancholic drives the Sanguine to heights that exaggerate many of the tendencies of the Sanguine. For example, image matters to a Sanguine so push that temperament to uncontrollable heights, and you can end up with delusions of grandeur.

How to Help

The key is in addressing the Melancholic. This is the energy that drives the swing. Everything we have already said about meeting the needs of the Melancholic can be brought to bear. He needs to talk, to be heard, to be understood, to realise his value and to begin to handle his emotions rather than being under their control. If he simply allows himself to feel what he feels without taking responsibility for what he does with those feelings, then the patterns will continue.

While it is true that the focus must be on the Melancholic, it will still be necessary to challenge the behaviour of the extrovert. He must not think that his behaviour is inevitable and that he has no control. This is one of the reasons why it is important to not see bipolar as a condition to be managed but rather as something that has its roots in emotions for which we can take responsibility.

This person is easier to work with when he is slightly down. Initially, you may have to content yourself with containing him when he is at the peak of a high or the depths of a low but really work hard when he is aware of what is going on in his Melancholic.