



# Bipolar Disorder

Symptoms or Behaviors	About the Disorder	Educational Implications	Instructional Strategies & Classroom Accommodations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansive or irritable mood</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Rapidly changing mood lasting a few hours to a few days</li> <li>• Explosive, lengthy and often destructive rages</li> <li>• Separation anxiety</li> <li>• Defiance of authority</li> <li>• Hyperactivity, agitation and distractibility</li> <li>• Strong and frequent cravings, often for carbohydrates and sweets</li> <li>• Excessive involvement in multiple projects and activities</li> <li>• Impaired judgment, impulsivity, racing thoughts</li> <li>• Dare-devil behavior</li> <li>• Inappropriate or precocious sexual behavior</li> <li>• Delusions, hallucinations, grandiose beliefs</li> </ul>	<p>Also known as manic-depressive illness, bipolar disorder, is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in a person's mood, energy, and ability to function. The symptoms are severe and can result in damaged relationships, poor job or school performance, and even suicide. More than 2 million adults (1% of the population 18 and older) in any given year have bipolar. Children and adolescents can also develop the disorder. Like diabetes, or heart disease, it is a long term illness that requires careful management. Youth with the illness experience very fast mood swings between depression and mania many times a time. Manic children are more likely to be irritable and prone to destructive tantrums than to be happy or elated. Older adolescents tend to develop classic, adult-type episodes and symptoms. Bipolar disorder in youth is often hard to differentiate from symptoms of other disorders (e.g. drug abuse). Effective treatment requires appropriate evaluation and diagnosis. Adolescents with bipolar are at higher risk of suicide. Any talk about feelings of suicide require immediate referral.</p>	<p>Students may experience fluctuations in mood, energy, and motivation. They may occur hourly, daily, in specific cycles, or seasonally. As a result, a student with bipolar may have difficulty concentrating and remembering assignments, understanding assignments with complex directions, or reading and comprehending long passages of text. Students may experience episodes of overwhelming emotion such as sadness, embarrassment, or rage. They may also have poor social skills and have difficulty getting along with their peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the student with recorded books as an alternative to self-reading when the student's concentration is low.</li> <li>• Break assigned reading into manageable segments and monitor the student's progress checking comprehension periodically..</li> <li>• Devise a flexible curriculum that accommodates the sometimes rapid changes in the ability to perform consistently in school.</li> <li>• When energy is low, reduce academic demands; when energy is high, increase opportunities for achievement.</li> <li>• Identify a place where the student can go for privacy until he or she regains self-control.</li> </ul> <p><i>- These suggestions are from the Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation. For more suggestions, consult the Foundation web site at <a href="http://www.bpkids.org">www.bpkids.org</a>. This site is a rich resource for teachers.</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health, St. Paul Minnesota, [www.macmh.org](http://www.macmh.org).