

Every child experiences some struggles while growing up, especially during the adolescent years. Kids who suffer from bipolar disorder, sometimes called Manic Depression, face especially difficult challenges. If you are the parent of a child with this disorder, you understand how hard it is to explain to other parents why your child acts the way she does. The negative judgments of others, as if parents are not doing enough to control their children, are damaging to the self-esteem of both parents and their bipolar children.

The truth is that children with bipolar disorder have an illness and should be treated with the same care and respect as a child with any other debilitating illness, such as cancer or a seizure disorder. But because not all children are affected by bipolar disorder in the same way, it is not instantly recognizable to outsiders, and indeed often hides itself from parents and mental health professionals.

What makes the disorder even more challenging for parents and medical professionals is the fact that it can change as the child grows. The frequency, intensity, and duration of symptoms and how the child responds to treatment can change dramatically. The disorder can be especially alarming in teens when some begin to display risky sexual behaviors during manic episodes.

Without proper treatment, families of bipolar children are at risk for violence, both emotional and physical. Bipolar children are at greater risk for suicide during depressive episodes and at risk for a number of other problems during manic episodes, such as drug dependence, sexually transmitted diseases, and the repercussions of violence against themselves and others.

Parents tend to think only of how to help their bipolar children, failing to think of themselves and the siblings who live with the bipolar child. But parents and siblings can benefit greatly from family-focused therapy, addressing what the disorder is, what it means and why medications are necessary. This sort of therapy relieves the family's anxiety and teaches coping strategies and safety measures. Such support systems are vital for these families to help them deal with the stress of living with a bipolar child and to help them be strong for the child who will often need more attention and protection than an otherwise healthy child would.