How to Talk About Bipolar Disorder With Loved Ones

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Talking About Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder can make a lot of aspects of one's life very difficult. It can put a strain on business relationships and personal relationships alike. That being said, individuals with bipolar disorder benefit significantly from having support from those around them.

Below you will find out why support for those living with bipolar is important and tips for talking about bipolar disorder with your loved ones.

Why Support for People With Bipolar Disorder is Important

Often, people with bipolar disorder may feel isolated. This can be due to their symptoms, or their lack of environmental support. This feeling of isolation can even exacerbate the symptoms of bipolar disorder. This isolation can also cause a large amount of anxiety due to the individual feeling like they have nobody to turn to.

However, for an individual to have a supportive family, they first have to overcome the hurdle of speaking about their diagnosis with them. For many, this can be difficult for a wide variety of reasons. Since this can be difficult, here are some tips on how to speak about your diagnosis with your loved ones.

Make Sure You're Safe to Tell Your Loved Ones

The safety of the individual with bipolar disorder and those around him are the most important factors. Unfortunately, there are some individuals who won't have supportive loved ones. In extreme instances, this can even put that individual in danger.

If you're worried about your safety, yet you still feel the need to tell your family, you can consider telling them at your therapist, or psychiatrist's office. Your mental health professional may have training in explaining your illness to family members who normally may be less supportive.

However, if you *know* it's unsafe to tell your loved ones about your illness, you should speak with your mental health professional about other options that may be available to you.

Only Tell Them When You Are Ready

Getting the courage to speak to the people closest to you about some of the most vulnerable parts of your life can be extremely intimidating. For some, this can cause a significant amount of anxiety.

Anxiety can often worsen the symptoms you're experiencing. If you're nervous or stressed about speaking with your loved ones about your diagnosis, talk to your therapist about it. They may be able to help you emotionally, and psychologically prepare yourself for opening up to your loved ones.

Remember, the state of your mental health is the most important factor. You need to take care of your own health, and you do not owe anyone an explanation unless you choose to.

Tell Them How Your Symptoms are Affecting You

Often, your family may not have the ability to empathize with your symptoms. This is mainly because they may not have bipolar disorder, or if they do, they may not experience the symptoms in the same way that you do. One way to explain to them how the disorder is affecting you is by describing how your everyday routine has been affected since you started experiencing your symptoms.

You can tell them how your mood cycling, manic episode, or depressive episode is affecting your productivity in work or school. This is a metric that they may be able to understand, which can make it more real for them. This may explain as to why they've noticed changes in your life since the illness started affecting you.

You may also want to speak about how it's affected your personal relationships and other responsibilities in your life. For example, often during depressive episodes, you may not have the same appreciation for activities that you used to enjoy. These are things that many of your loved ones may have even noticed since the onset of your symptoms.

If You're Comfortable With it, Tell Them About Your Symptoms

If you've started acting more impulsive, sporadic, or more withdrawn, explain to them that these new behaviors are caused (or affected by) the illness. For example, this may explain why you may be less patient or more irritable with your loved ones during an episode.

If they're supportive, this can help them understand that it's the illness causing you to treat them differently, not you. Helping them understand this can also help put their insecurities at ease. This can help prevent them from reacting negatively to any new behaviors you may have due to your symptoms.

Encourage Them to Perform Some Research

If they're interested in learning further about your illness, encourage them to do some research.

Many online publications have articles aimed at assisting loved ones of individuals who have bipolar disorder. There are also articles detailing how they can help their loved one dealing with the illness.

Conducting research, and becoming involved in support groups can help your loved ones feel like they're not the only ones experiencing these difficulties.

Ultimately, It's Up to You

As we discussed earlier, the most important thing is making sure you're ready to speak to your loved ones about your illness. If you're experiencing severe anxiety when considering talking to them, or you don't feel ready to speak with your loved ones, there is nothing wrong with that. Remember, you're the one dealing with the illness, and it is your choice.

If you're ready to speak with your loved ones about your illness, it may provide them with some clarity regarding any new behaviors you may be exhibiting.