4 Tips for Parenting With Bipolar

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Bipolar and Parenting: 4 Tips to Keep in Mind

Being a loving and responsible parent is more of a challenge than any of us can even begin to realize. We are in charge of not only providing our children with their basic needs, but we are also responsible for administering love, understanding, and acceptance. Having bipolar and parenting can make this journey even more tricky.

It is never an easy job, but it is easier when we are in good physical and mental health. However, when we are having difficulties with our health or our circumstances, it is downright impossible to give our very best selves to our children.

When struggling with bipolar disorder, we are at a considerable disadvantage. Our illness prevents us from adequately taking care of our own needs, which in turn lowers our self-esteem. The fact that we are unable to provide adequate parenting during this time just adds to our despair and heartache

In the manic stage, our attention is usually focused in the wrong direction. Many of us go to extremes in just about everything. We can spend too much, do too much, and take chances that we would not ordinarily take without even considering the risks. We can feel invincible, powerful, limitless, and fearless. Our energy is boundless and there is almost little need for sleep.

In the depressive stage, we are filled with deep sadness and despair. We have the excessive need for sleep and we simply lose the ability to function. The fear is paralyzing and we isolate ourselves from others. It is not who we are. It is what the illness does to us.

Below are four bipolar and parenting tips to help people who are living with bipolar disorder.

It's Important to Be Aware

First, we need to recognize and become aware that something is wrong. So many of us are undiagnosed for way too long.

A few years before my first major clinical depressive episode, I knew that something did not feel right. I just did not know what it was. I felt different and I felt strange — I was not myself. So, I did what came naturally. I tried to figure it out myself and I kept my feelings, confusion, and fear bottled up inside. So of course, things got worse.

It is not our job to try and figure out what is wrong. Our job is to simply accept that we have an illness that we do not quite understand, and we need help. It is important to accept that during this time, we are not going to be the perfect parent, but we can find ways to provide for our children, no matter what our circumstances are.

For example. if you were in a car accident and had to be hospitalized for a number of weeks, you would simply have to accept the fact that you are unable to be there for your children. You would need to rely on others to

provide care when you could not, such as making arrangements for babysitting, preparing meals, or help with laundry. You might feel sad that you are unable to provide those needs for your children, but I doubt that you would feel as guilty.

Seek Treatment and Ask for Help

Understand that it is necessary to seek treatment immediately. If you feel emotionally unstable, reach out to a therapist or even to ask a close friend or relative for help.

A loved one can make an appointment for you if you are in the clinical stage of depression and cannot do it yourself. They can drive you to your appointment if necessary. They may not even know that something is wrong with you, so it is your responsibility to tell them how you are feeling.

Most of us put on a brave act so that it may appear as if everything is just fine. We have the ability to smile through our pain and act normal. We are almost too resilient.

Helping yourself is really helping your children. They are most likely experiencing their own sadness and feelings of helplessness. You cannot hide the pain from your children. They intuitively know something is wrong.

Tell them you are going to see a doctor to help you get better. It will make them feel better. It is not necessary to explain everything. Keep it simple.

Express Love and Affection

We can underestimate the importance of love and affection. Hugs and loving words offer comfort and healing.

Tell your children how much you love them and how special they are. They will feel comforted and so will you.

Many times, children may think it is their fault that you are feeling sad. They think that it is something that they have done. Help them to understand that it is just an illness and it has nothing to do with them.

Lower Your Expectations of Yourself

This is not the time to be a super parent. You should not expect perfection in yourself when it comes to bipolar and parenting. You will get well one step at a time.

Try to keep everything simple. No need to cook lavish meals. Order take out. Prepare meals that are easy to make.

No matter what age they are, find ways they can help. Food shopping can seem like a monumental task. Most of the time we have no desire to cook or eat. We are just not hungry. You might ask a friend or relative to pick up items at the store for you.

These are ways that you can help your children by helping yourself. You will feel better and they will feel better. Life will not seem entirely out of control.

Keep up your appearance. You do not have to look like a model, but you do need to look presentable to your children. I remember being in the depths of depression and unable to function. No matter what, I was there for breakfast and wished them well. I would crawl in bed as soon as they left but minutes before they came home I would put on my makeup, fix my hair, put on decent clothes, and present them with a smile on my face.

Sometimes we have to fake it until we make it. Our children do not expect perfection, but they need the best we have to offer at any given time, in sickness and in health.