How to Manage Bipolar Disorder

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Creating a Symptom Timeline

One of the most important tools you can have when wondering how to manage bipolar disorder is the ability to see yourself, your symptoms, and the world around you with objectivity. With objectivity, you are more rational, logical and better equipped to make good choices. Unfortunately, this is exactly what bipolar disorder steals from you. Bipolar disorder brings changing moods, levels of energy and decision-making skills that distort the way you perceive things.

A way to add more objectivity to your life and your past is a life timeline. The timeline allows you to list major life events in an easy to understand way. Chances are excellent that you will discover patterns and connections in your life you have never even considered.

Finding Time

Here's how to create your own timeline:

- **Prepare your timeline** – Creating a timeline on a sheet of paper turned on its side is the simplest method. Draw a horizontal line from left to right on your page. The left represents birth and younger years and the right represents older years up to today. The straightforwardness of the paper and pencil allows you to focus more on the content and less about the process of completing the task. Using a computer is acceptable as long as you feel comfortable with the program. Using a whiteboard is discouraged since there is no permanency to it.
- **Positive life experiences** – Start by thinking about happy life experiences and accomplishments and mark their relative place on the timeline and include a short description and date. First day of school will go towards the left and birth of your child will be on the right or towards the middle depending on your age. Only track the significant life events as you do not want your timeline to be overly crowded.
- **Negative life experiences** – Even if you have not experienced a trauma, chances are good you have experienced several negative events. Like with the positive, track only the most significant situations. If a negative experience spanned a long period of time, feel free to use a bracket to signify the duration.
- **Depressive episodes** – When was your first depressive episode? Add it to the left of your timeline. When was your most recent episode? Add it towards the right. A depressive episode is a length of time, usually two weeks or more, where you had a low mood, low energy, low motivation and other symptoms related to depression. Symptoms are different for everyone so take time to ponder yours.

- **Manic episodes** – You know that periods of mania or hypomania are part of bipolar disorder. Look for periods of time where you required less sleep, had more energy, were more impulsive or made many poor choices. You will have fewer manic episodes than depressive so take extra care to place them accurately.
- **Other experiences** – If another major live event occurred that is not covered above, add it. The more information the better your timeline will be.

Conclusion

Your completed timeline provides you with enormous amounts of information. Inspect it and ask your trusted supports to do the same. A therapist or psychiatrist can look for triggers or patterns in your timeline and gain a better understanding of how your bipolar disorder operates. Creating a bipolar disorder timeline is a simple and effective way for managing bipolar disorder while understanding yourself and your symptoms a bit better.