Coping With Feelings

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Bipolar and Feelings

Your feelings change with bipolar disorder. Whether it is daily or monthly, the changing feelings become difficult to identify and understand. Before long, you may begin ignoring them altogether. Rather than making feelings more manageable, ignoring them allows your feelings to grow and change without your awareness.

There are several ways to ignore the way you feel. The first is the personality pattern called alexithymia. In this, there is a lack of expression of feelings. The second is the pulling-in personality pattern. Here, you become very passive and stay isolated to avoid conflicts and confrontations. The final is disassociation. With disassociation, you experience numbness and disconnecting to negative situations. Though these patterns differ, the commonality is that they negatively impact every aspect of your life.

Being connected and in touch with how you feel may seem like a scary or an anxiety-provoking process but the rewards outweigh the risks. Consider the rewards of what knowing your feelings can do:

- Help you become a real, authentic person while ending denial
- Assist in expanding your emotional range by being able to feel positive feelings
- Aid in living life in the moment rather than the depression of the past or anxiety of the future
- Grow in the ability to have meaningful relationships by improving listening and assertive communication skills

Feel your Feelings

If some time has passed since you've paid attention to how you feel, the process might be uncomfortable. Following the tips below will allow you to no longer avoid your feelings. Here's how:

- **Get acquainted with how you feel.** As people work to avoid how they feel, they begin to reduce their emotional range. These people may only feel anger, depression and anxiety while the positive feelings are excluded and forgotten. Search for lists of positive and negative words online. Think about times when your experience would be better described by a different word. Expanding your vocabulary adds a new dimension to your situation.

- **Notice how others might feel.** Bipolar forces you to be consumed with your own thoughts on some level. Building an accurate understanding of how other people feel will translate to you understanding your own. Watch TV shows, movies or the lives of your friends to see how people react differently. Ask your supports how they felt in a situation to gain information.
- **Keep a journal.** Instead of using a journal to track events of the day only, use your journal to track feelings triggered by events. Use your new, expanded vocabulary to identify how you feel the best. Using more words encourages you to break the habit of seeing the world in black or white or good or bad ways. The journal will also present patterns that you can address.

- **Seek out the positives.** People with bipolar may be used to feeling only the unwanted emotions. Find ways to experience positive emotions through trying new activities, going new places and engaging in new behaviors. After you are done, work to list and identify the positive emotions. Compare your experience with those around you to make sure you are on the right track.

Conclusion

Appropriately expressing your feelings is a healthy activity. By restricting or eliminating your emotional expression, you are keeping out all feelings, not just the negative. Understand that there are risks associated with feeling, but they are far outweighed by the rewards.