

BIPOLAR DISORDER IN THE WORKPLACE

Bipolar disorder greatly affects an individual's mood in a way that can be very disruptive in every facet of the individual's life, including work. This disorder causes dramatic shifts in mood and energy levels in an uncontrollable way. The good news is that many people who work with healthcare professionals to treat their bipolar disorder can certainly manage their symptoms in a way that allows them to live a balanced and functional life in and out of work.

Bipolar Disorder: Mania and Depression

Mania symptoms can mimic a high. Manic episodes include initial feelings of being elated, energized, and inspired but can quickly turn into delusional thinking, hallucinations and dangerous behavior. Other symptoms include talking very fast, becoming more irritable, overspending, and insomnia. Those individuals who experience bipolar disorder will experience manic episodes at varying degrees of severity. Hypomania is a term used to describe a light state of mania. Hypomania is difficult to catch as it can be disguised as a good mood, therefore many people do not realize they're experiencing a manic episode, and consequently do not get diagnosed accurately.

Depressive episodes experienced by those who have bipolar disorder manifest similarly to those who experience depression. These symptoms may include a decrease in energy, losing interest or pleasure in all activities, suicidal thoughts and sleep changes. Suicide is a very real risk associated with those who experience bipolar disorder so additional caution needs to be placed on any type of suicidal ideation.

In the Workplace

The unpredictable nature of work, and the stressors associated with work can be a distinct challenge for employees who experience bipolar disorder. Finding a trusted colleague to lean on for support can be a helpful resource for the more challenging days of bipolar disorder.



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Managing Bipolar Disorder at Work

Since drastic mood swings are a challenge employees with bipolar disorder face, having a stable schedule and routine can help. Schedules that remain consistent also benefit those who live with bipolar disorder by allowing them to keep a consistent sleep schedule which is an important factor in managing this disorder.

If you work with someone who has bipolar disorder, there are a couple of practices you can engage in to offer your support. Try to avoid causing sleep disturbances, such as asking for tasks outside normal working hours. These boundaries can help those employees have time to manage their stress outside of work. You can also encourage rest and self-care for these individuals.

For Managers

If you are in a leadership position, do not underestimate the value of reiterating the importance of safety and well-being in your workplace. Make sure your employees are informed on what type of resources are available to them.

Making your workplace an environment where it is OK to discuss mental health struggles will increase the likelihood of employees reaching out to someone if they are struggling. By having these open, and vulnerable conversations we can begin to end the stigma of mental health, and the shame associated with asking for help won't be another battle those with a disorder have to face.

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