

Bipolar Disorder in Children

Bipolar disorder is a being diagnosed in children as young as six years old in recent years. Some doctors think this is a good assessment of many children while others think the diagnosis is overdone. While it may be just an intellectual controversy to some, others who know a child who may have bipolar disorder will not be amused. It is important therefore to take into account all the facets of the disorder.

It is a tricky diagnosis to say the least. Bipolar disorder in children often appears similar to ADHD, or as simply rambunctious childhood behavior. Young children may cycle fast, meaning that they go from a depressed state to a manic state and back, etc. very quickly, often within weeks or even days.

Suicide attempts often happen on the spur of the moment, with little or no warning. This is different than in most adults where the depression is often long-lasting and suicide attempts may be well thought-out. For this reason it is imperative that children with the disorder be treated successfully.

Bipolar disorder in children often presents in mania. In the younger children this is often likely to come with hallucinations, both auditory and visual. It may seem that these would be difficult to distinguish from a healthy imagination. Sometimes, in fact, it is. Many times, though, the visions and voices are more disturbing and threatening than a healthy child would imagine.

Teens with bipolar disorder are, for the most part, similar in their symptoms to adults. A major complicating factor with teens is the use of drugs and alcohol. As with adults, this practice of trying to use street drugs and alcohol to control mood swings, is called "self-medicating." It is a dangerous business and often masks the symptoms of the disorder. Bipolar disorder in children should always be considered when drugs are being used by them, if only to rule it out.

Bipolar disorder in children who are older, such as teenagers, is still different from the adult disorder in that the person with the disorder is still a minor. This leads to situations where the older child has an adversarial relationship with authorities and is therefore hard to convince that treatment is a good thing.

There are some ways to cut down on the confusion. Speaking with the child's teachers gives an outside opinion of how the child is doing day-to-day. Also, this shows how the child fares in a different setting from the home environment. Bipolar disorder in children, if it is masquerading as some other form of

disorder or behavior, is more likely to be found out if more people are alert to its symptoms.

Getting a second opinion is also very important, since so many doctors disagree on bipolar disorder in children. Once the second opinion is obtained, the family can make a more informed decision as to what the problem is and how to proceed. Doctors may not all agree on bipolar disorder in children, but a second opinion should help to clarify the situation. The parent or guardian can listen carefully and determine if the doctor's explanation sounds accurate. Then, ultimately, it is the parents' job to make the call. Misdiagnosis and wrong treatment would be unthinkable, but if bipolar disorder in children is the correct diagnosis, it is surely better to accept it.