

# COPING METHODS FOR THE FAMILY

SOURCE: Organization for Bipolar Affective Disorder (OBAD)

"No one is to blame, and you cannot cure a mental disorder for a family member."

## Things to consider:

- Despite medication compliance, episodes may occur. It may take some time to find the right medications and dosages. Additionally, the symptoms of the disorder may change over time requiring medication adjustments.
  - Despite your efforts, the symptoms may get worse.
  - Separate the person from the disorder. Love the person, hate the disorder, and separate the medication side effects from the disorder/person.
  - It is NOT okay for you to neglect your needs. Take care of yourself, ensuring you have a rich and fulfilling life. Do not shoulder the whole responsibility for your family member. You may have to assess your emotional commitment.
  - There is nothing to be ashamed of if someone in your family has a neurological chemical brain disorder.
  - It is natural to experience many strong emotions such as denial, grief, guilt, fear, anger, sadness, hurt, and confusion. Healing occurs with acceptance and understanding. Allow your affected family member and other family members to go through their grieving processes at their own pace. This is also true for you.
- You may have to re-evaluate your expectations. Your family member's successes may be experienced differently from others. However, recognizing that a person has limited capabilities should not mean that you should expect nothing of them. It is important to set boundaries and set clear limits.
  - Do not be afraid to ask if your family member is contemplating suicide. Remember that suicide attempts are a cry for help. Often the individual is trying to escape from the consequences of the disorder, and they feel hopeless.
  - Siblings may experience concern anticipating extended care of their family member, even though this may not be realistic.
  - They may worry that they could be or might become like the affected family member.
  - They also could have concerns about whether they should have children or not. Will their children be affected with the disorder? Reassure them.
  - Healthy children may overcompensate to prove their mental health and stability, or to show that they are normal.
  - Healthy children will likely feel anger and resentment at the affected sibling and feel guilty that they were not diagnosed with the disorder.
  - Embarrassment and feelings of shame for the family may be experienced after diagnosis of mental illness in the family.





- 🧠 Healthy children may experience grief over the change in their brother or sister.
- 🧠 They may have trouble in establishing and maintaining a healthy relationship with their affected sibling. Healthy siblings may also have feelings of disagreement with diagnosis, not realizing that they are in denial.
- 🧠 Try to remember that this will affect the whole family. Children may have a more difficult time coping than adults may. Spend time with all children and give reassurance and love. Calmly and openly discuss any concerns that they may have.

## Family matters

### Monitor behavior

- 🧠 Monitor behavior without being intrusive. Be discreet. Individuals who are experiencing symptoms of mania will probably deny that there is anything wrong with them. People in depression will often isolate from the family. They need to know you still love them.
- 🧠 Monitor any reckless or endangering activity.
- 🧠 Pay attention to any extravagant expenditures or excessive shopping sprees. This could indicate a potential manic episode.
- 🧠 Listen carefully to word choices to determine an impending episode. If you notice rapid speech this could be hypomania. It is important to acknowledge the symptoms you see and confront the family member with how they are feeling to find out if there is a problem, or if it is just a normal fluctuation in mood.

## Maintain a close relationship

- 🧠 Tell your family member how much you love them and mean it. Give them a hug when they need one.
- 🧠 Treat your family member with dignity and respect.
- 🧠 Include your family member at family gatherings or outings. However, recognize that sometimes your family member may not feel able to attend because of symptoms associated with the disorder or their medications.
- 🧠 If your family member does not live at home, contact them by telephone on a regular basis.
- 🧠 Help. If they do not have transportation, offer to go shopping with them or help do their laundry. Prepare frozen dinners that can be re-heated.

## Sources of income

- 🧠 Often, we see families providing financial assistance to family members during difficult times throughout an episode. This often is not only a large responsibility, but also a point of tension or strain.
- 🧠 Persons with a mental health disability are entitled to apply for financial assistance from various government agencies.





"There is hope and there is help."



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