



BIPOLAR DISORDER

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in a person's mood, energy, and ability to function. Different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through, the symptoms of bipolar disorder are more severe and may result in damaged relationships, poor job or school performance, and even suicide. It is important to remember that bipolar disorder is very treatable and can reduce the severity of symptoms.

Bipolar disorder causes dramatic mood swings—from overly "high" and/or irritable to sad and hopeless, and then back again, often with periods of normal mood in between. Severe changes in energy and behavior go along with these changes in mood. The periods of highs and lows are called episodes of mania and depression.

Symptoms may include:

- Increased energy, activity, and restlessness
- Excessively "high," overly good, euphoric mood
- Extreme irritability
- Racing thoughts and talking very fast, jumping from one idea to another
- Distractibility, can't concentrate well
- Little sleep needed
- Unrealistic beliefs in one's abilities and powers
- Poor judgment
- Spending sprees
- A lasting period of behavior that is different from usual
- Increased sexual drive
- Abuse of drugs, particularly cocaine, alcohol, and sleeping medications
- Provocative, intrusive, or aggressive behavior
- Denial that anything is wrong

Persons with Bi-Polar Disorder in the Workplace

Accommodation Examples for People With Psychiatric Disabilities

People who have psychiatric disabilities may develop some of these limitations, but seldom develop all of them. The degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people who have psychiatric disabilities will need accommodations to perform their job and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is a sample of possible accommodations available. Numerous other accommodation solutions exist as well.

Maintaining Stamina during The Workday:

- Flexible scheduling
- Allow longer or more frequent work breaks
- Provide additional time to learn new responsibilities



- Provide self-paced workload
- Provide backup coverage for when the employee needs to take breaks
- Allow for time off for counseling
- Allow for use of supported employment and job coaches
- Allow employee to work from home during part of the day, or week
- Part-time work schedules

Maintaining Concentration:

- Reduce distractions in the work area
- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Allow for use of white noise or environmental sound machines
- Allow the employee to play soothing music using a cassette player and headset
- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Allow the employee to work from home and provide necessary equipment
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Allow for frequent breaks
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals
- Restructure job to include only essential functions

Staying Organized And Meeting Deadlines:

- Make daily TO-DO lists and check items off as they are completed
- Use several calendars to mark meetings and deadlines
- Remind employee of important deadlines
- Use electronic organizers
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals

Memory Deficits:

- Allow the employee to tape record meetings
- Provide type written minutes of each meeting
- Provide written instructions
- Allow additional training time
- Provide written checklists

Working Effectively With Supervisors:

- Provide positive praise and reinforcement
- Provide written job instructions
- Develop written work agreements that include the agreed upon accommodations, clear expectations of responsibilities and the consequences of not meeting performance standards
- Allow for open communication to managers and supervisors
- Establish written long term and short term goals
- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise
- Develop a procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation



Interacting With Coworkers:

- Educate all employees on their right to accommodations
- Provide sensitivity training to coworkers and supervisors
- Do not mandate employees attend work related social functions
- Encourage all employees to move non-work related conversations out of work areas

Difficulty Handling Stress And Emotions:

- Provide praise and positive reinforcement
- Refer to counseling and employee assistance programs
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow the presence of a support animal
- Allow the employee to take breaks as needed

Attendance Issues:

- Provide flexible leave for health problems
- Provide a self-paced work load and flexible hours
- Allow employee to work from home
- Provide part-time work schedule
- Allow employee to make up time

Issues of Change:

- Recognize that a change in the office environment or of supervisors may be difficult for a person with a psychiatric disability.
- Maintain open channels of communication between the employee and the new and old supervisor in order to ensure an effective transition.
- Provide weekly or monthly meetings with the employee to discuss workplace issues and productions levels.

This information was compiled by Open Door Group to assist BC businesses to have successful working relationship with persons with disabilities in our communities.

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