Living with bipolar disorder

Living with a bipolar disorder individual in the home can be a stressful problem for the family as they witness their loved ones engulfed in episodes of mania and depression.

The same factors that would pose a threat to peaceful family life for any family carry greater risks when living with a bipolar individual. Alcohol and drug abuse, lies, reckless spending, rage, depression, hypersexuality, suicidal inclination, and hallucinating all have the potential to upset family peace and integrity.

To minimise risk, both the sufferer and the friends and family need coping mechanisms. This usually boils down to that of issues regarding routine, organization, forward planning and a sense of humour far greater than normal. There is no disputing the fact that the power of laughter improves one’s sense of wellbeing to elevate the mood and help keep things in perspective.

It is important to know that few bipolar patients are dangerous so there is no need to feel physically threatened. Assuming they have been correctly diagnosed and are monitored by health professionals the disruptions to normal family life will be minimised.

Disruptions are more likely if the person has not yet been diagnosed, or has been misdiagnosed, or for whatever reason doesn’t take the medication prescribed them.

The best course of action for any support team is to seek help as soon as possible if the behaviour of the individual is beyond what could be considered reasonable or normal even if the individual denies there being anything wrong and sees nothing unusual in their behaviour.

One should try to identify triggers such as stressful life events that are likely to spark the episodes of mania or depression. These might be memories of events like deaths, anniversaries, traumas, and the like. Keep a record of such events in your journal and learn to insulate your bipolar family member from them.

Living with bipolar disorder requires fighting not only your own irritation but also, and more importantly, the fears of the bipolar person. They have a craving for being in control of situations that is rooted in their fear of losing control and the attention of the family. With a lot of patience love and care, family and friends can help abate these fears and provide help and support in social situations.

Manic episodes with psychotic features like hallucinations (voices, sounds, etc.) can occur with bipolar I individuals. What seems real to the patient might be construed as nonsense or bipolar lying to others. It is important to understand that "reality" is different for the sufferer who is simply recalling the experience as perceived. Acceptance of the relativism of reality goes a long way to curbing anger in such situations.

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