

Bipolar? Keep track of these warning signs

There are a number of warning signs of manic episodes, (Part I) red flags as many call them, of which we should be aware. By learning these early indicators, red flags will go up before a loved one rockets into a manic spree, before you slide into depression, before a friend actually attempts suicide. In this article, we look at some of the common red flags for mania and hypomania. Part II looks at depression flags; Part III the warning flags for Suicide. These symptoms are organized into broad categories for easier reference.

Part 1

Increased energy

- Decreased sleep
- Little fatigue
- An increase in activities
- Restlessness

Speech Disruptions

- Rapid, pressured speech
- Incoherent speech (generally not present in hypomania)
- Clang associations: the association of words based on their sound (For example, my ex-husband once carried on for some time about vacancies, vagrancies and bacon seeds.)

Impaired Judgment

- Lack of insight
- Inappropriate humor
- Inappropriate behaviors
- Impulsive behaviors
- Financial extravagance
- Grandiose thinking

Increased or Decreased Sexuality

- May include inappropriate or sexual behavior

Changes in Thought Patterns

- Distractibility
- Creative thinking
- Flight of ideas
- Disorientation
- Disjointed thinking
- Racing thoughts

Changes in Mood

- Irritability
- Excitability
- Hostility
- Feelings of exhilaration

Changes in Perceptions

- Inflated self-esteem
- Hallucinations(not present in hypomania)
- Delusions(not present in hypomania)
- Paranoia (generally not severe in hypomania)
- Increased religious activities

Hypomania also differs from bipolar mania in that the symptoms are generally less severe so that they do not cause significant impairment of daily activities. There are no psychotic features present in hypomania.

More often than not, those who are close to us will notice our little red flags long before we will. If someone you love is waving flags, express concern. And if someone you love expresses concern, listen.

We continue the topic of red flags, those early indicators of an impending mood swing, with the depressive episode. A depressive episode, as it relates to bipolar disorder, can be defined as the downswing in a mood cycle. Depression is characterized by profound sadness, dejection or despair. Generally depression is not tied to a specific experience or it is well beyond a typical response to a painful event. It is an extreme emotional state that impairs daily living.

Part 11: I have organized these symptoms into broad categories for easier reference. It is important to note that **depression** is experienced differently from one person to the next so not all symptoms will present for all individuals.

Changes In Activity or Energy Level

- Decreased Energy
- Fatigue
- Lethargy
- Diminished Activity
- Insomnia or Hypersomnia
- Loss of Interest in Pleasurable Activities
- Social Withdrawal

Physical Changes

- Unexplained Aches and Pains
- Weight Loss or Gain
- Decreased or Increased Appetite
- Psychomotor Agitation or Retardation

Emotional Pain

- Prolonged Sadness
- Unexplained, Uncontrollable Crying
- Feelings of Guilt
- Feelings of Worthlessness
- Loss of Self-Esteem
- Despair
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness

Difficult Moods

- Irritability
- Anger
- Worry/Anxiety
- Pessimism
- Indifference
- Self-Critical

Changes in Thought Patterns

- Inability to Concentrate
- Indecision
- Problems with Memory
- Disorganized

Preoccupation with Death

- Thoughts of Death
- Suicidal Ideation
- Feeling Dead or Detached

So, the subject of suicide is not something we can ignore. Each of us needs to know the warnings signs, the red flags, of despair, so we may be prepared to help a friend in crisis, prepared to see the cry for help from a loved one, prepared to seek help when our own resources for coping have worn thin.

Part 111: How to Prevent Suicide

Situational Indicators

- Loss of a Relationship Via Rejection or Separation
- Death of a Loved One
- Diagnosis of a Terminal Illness
- Loss of Financial Security
- A Change in Physical Appearance
- Loss of Employment/A New Job
- Loss of Self-Esteem
- Abuse

Emotional Indicators

- Depression
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness

A Sudden Lift Of Depression!

It is a well-known fact that as a person begins to climb from depression the possibility of a suicide attempt increases. There are two thoughts as to why this happens. The first is that when a person makes up their mind to take their own life, they become more at peace with the situation. They feel more in control and thus the depression begins to lighten. The second idea is that as lethargy lifts, a person finds the energy to carry out suicidal plans made while incapacitated. Regardless of the reason, however, this is a very critical time.

Behavioral Indicators

- Acquiring a Weapon
- Hoarding Medication
- Putting Affairs in Order
- Making or Changing a Will
- Increased Interest in Suicide
- Giving Away Personal Belongings
- Mending Grievances
- Checking on Insurance Policy
- Withdrawing from People

Verbal Indicators

- Straightforward Comments:
 - "I wish I were dead"
 - "I wish I had the nerve to kill myself."
 - "I wish I could die in my sleep."
 - "If it weren't for my kids, my husband ... I would commit suicide."
- Hints:
 - "I hate life."
 - "Why do I bother?"
 - "I can't take it anymore."
 - "Nothing matters anymore."

Note that these signs are not proof positive that someone is considering suicide. Any number of these signs may be evident, but the person has given little or no thought to taking their own life. The reverse is also true. A person may give no warning of an impending suicide attempt. So how do you know for sure? Ask. Yes, ask! Be open to discussing this difficult subject with your loved one. It could save a life.

More information about Bipolar at <http://www.bipolar.about.com>.