



Health Awareness

Uncover The “Family Ties” Of Bipolar Disorder at www.MentalHealthFamilyTree.org

(NAPSA)—When Renee was a teenager, her father began to act differently. He was irritable all of the time and started isolating himself from everyone; he never seemed to sleep; and he spent money recklessly, causing the family financial difficulties. He withdrew from his friends and started having trouble at work. “He went from being social and fun to be around, to quiet and withdrawn,” Renee recalls. “The change was dramatic.” Then, without any warning, Renee’s father abandoned her family.

Years later, Renee, now a devoted wife and mother of three, began to experience some of the same behaviors that she saw her father struggle with. She experienced rapid mood swings, overspent when she went shopping, had racing thoughts and found herself uninterested in things she used to enjoy. “I had a strong tendency to isolate myself,” Renee explains. When she began behaving erratically and unpredictably, her family convinced her to see a psychiatrist, who hospitalized her and diagnosed her with bipolar disorder.

“When I saw the doctor, she asked if anyone in my family had a mental illness,” Renee says. “I told her that my father had been diagnosed with depression. But as we discussed my behaviors—and my father’s—it became clear that we both probably had bipolar disorder because of the depressive

Identify Common Behaviors of Bipolar Disorder and Get the Help You Need

- Increased energy or over-activity with decreased need for sleep
- More talkative and/or rapid speech
- Trouble at work, school or home
- Persistently sad or irritable
- Trouble sleeping and/or eating
- Grandiosity or euphoria
- Diminished interest or pleasure
- Substance abuse
- Suicidal thoughts or statements
- Risky behavior or poor judgment



and manic behaviors we exhibited. I wish that someone could have figured that out when I was young. Maybe our family wouldn’t have been torn apart.”

“Bipolar disorder, sometimes called manic depression, often runs in families, just like heart disease or certain types of cancers,” explains Julie Totten, president and founder of Families for Depression Awareness (FFDA), a national nonprofit organization that helps families recognize and cope with depressive disorders. “If people can provide their doctors with information about their family’s mental health history, physicians can more quickly and accurately diagnose the condition.”

The Mental Health Family Tree program ([\[HealthFamilyTree.org\]\(http://www.MentalHealthFamilyTree.org\)\), recently launched by FFDA, draws attention to the important role a person’s family mental health history can play in diagnosing bipolar disorder, while helping individuals identify some of the common—but sometimes unknown—behaviors associated with the condition.](http://www.Mental</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Through the Mental Health Family Tree program, people concerned about the existence of bipolar disorder in themselves or in family members can complete a simple, interactive questionnaire—or “builder”—to better understand behaviors associated with the condition and to map the behaviors of bipolar disorder in their family.

This builder results in a “family tree” that individuals can print out and use to facilitate conversations with doctors to help lead to quicker and more accurate bipolar disorder diagnoses. It can also be shared with family members to reduce stigma surrounding bipolar disorder, and emphasize that this is a medical condition, not a shameful family secret.

The builder can be found on www.MentalHealthFamilyTree.org along with other helpful resources, including tips for patients and families on dealing with bipolar disorder. If diagnosed and treated correctly, bipolar disorder can be managed, and people with the condition can live healthy and productive lives.