

MOOD REGULATION ISSUES IN ADOLESCENTS

Many adolescents and teenagers have a day, or even a few days, when they get upset... they are known to slam a door or curse at their parents etc... But teens with mood regulation issues tend to engage in more extreme behaviors — and more often — than the average teen, and these behaviors impair their social, school and working lives.

Mood regulation issues in adolescents are frequently classified as “borderline personality disorder” or “bipolar”(another name for which is “manic depression”).

Even for the most seasoned clinician or specialist it is difficult to differentiate one disorder from another in adolescents. However, making the distinction is significant because of the varied treatment options.

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) in adolescents is characterized by impulsive behaviors, shifting moods and more often than not, frequent thoughts of suicide.

For example, a teenager with borderline personality disorder may get angry, slam a door and then proceed to cut them selves or overdose on pills and require medical attention. Another teen with BPD may feel sad and lonely and proceed to abuse alcohol and engage in promiscuous sex, which may result in pregnancy. The point here is that these teens’ extreme behavior typically follows their inability to tolerate negative emotions like anger.

Most adolescents with BPD can cycle through moods more variably and rapidly: They might be sad for several hours, then be in a “normal” mood for several hours, then anxious for one hour, and then angry for several hours, and so on.

If a teen meets 5 of 9 criteria in the DSM-IV (the manual of mental disorders that health professionals use for diagnosis), they may be diagnosed with BPD. The various criteria typically includes extremely poor regulation of mood and behavior that lasts more than a year and that is unrelated to another psychiatric disorder.

BIPOLAR DISORDER (OR MANIC DEPRESSION)

The main defining feature of bipolar disorder in comparison to BPD, is a more intense depressed or manic state, lasting for a minimum of several days at a time.

Bipolar disorder is characterized by dramatic or unusual mood swings between major depression and extreme elation, or mania. The mood swings can be mild or extreme. They can come on slowly or quickly, within hours to days. Bipolar disorder usually starts between 15 and 30 years of age. It's more prevalent in teens with a family history of the mood disorder.

The two subtypes of bipolar disorder are: bipolar I and bipolar II.

Bipolar I: the teenager alternates between extreme states of depression and intense mania. With the mania, the teen might be abnormally happy, energetic, and very talkative, with no need for sleep for days. He or she might also have hallucinations, psychosis, grandiose delusions, and/or paranoid rage, all of which might require hospitalization and medications.

Bipolar II: the teen has depression but a lesser form of elation called "hypomania." While someone with either mania or hypomania may have grandiose mood and reduced need for sleep, hypomania is a period of incredible energy, charm, and productivity. It's often associated with high achievers.

While many teens can be irritable with or without bipolar disorder, the irritability that comes with mania or "hypomania" may be more hostile. In fact, some believe there is a link between ADHD and bipolar disorder. Some 57% of teens that have adolescent-onset bipolar disorder also have ADHD.

TREATMENT

Adolescents who are diagnosed with bipolar disorder likely need to be on medication. It is usually suggested that in addition to medication, various types of psychotherapy, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy and dialectical behavior therapy are helpful in keeping BDP under control. If teens are treated with medication- especially earlier in their treatment history- many with BPD can function well without medication once they have learned effective strategies to manage their emotions and behaviors.

Studies have shown that the technique, dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is effective for teens with BPD, bipolar disorder and other mood regulation issues. Dialectical behavior therapy, a derivative of cognitive behavior therapy, helps patients identify thoughts, beliefs and assumptions that make their lives challenging and then learn different ways of thinking and reacting. Teaching emotional coping skills to teens with borderline personality disorder

The aim is to teach adolescents and their families a variety of life skills intended to better regulate their emotions and behaviors. These skills modules include:

- Mindfulness
- Emotion regulation
- Distress tolerance
- Interpersonal effectiveness
- Walking the middle path

In addition to the conventional treatments Wilderness Therapy (WT) promotes real and long lasting change. Teenagers who enter WT programs with bi-polar disorder learn through intensive individualized therapy how to have greater control over their emotions. The beautiful surroundings the wellness program and the various challenges, also greatly contribute to the overwhelming success WT has had in helping troubled teenagers who struggle with mood regulation issues and disorders.

MOOD REGULATION ISSUES IN YOUNG ADULTS

Mood regulation issues are serious conditions that affect many individuals in the general population. Even with its prevalent presence not much is commonly understood. Some people may become confused and think an individual suffering from mood regulation issues simply may be experiencing a bad day or be upset. But those that are suffering from these issues experience more extreme behaviors and find their social, school, and working lives impaired.

Individuals living with adolescents or young adults that suffer from mood regulation issues are often aware that something is wrong with the behavior of their loved-one or family member. It can be a difficult situation to be aware of someone suffering, and be powerless by not knowing what to do.

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

The most commonly used name today to describe mood regulation issues is Borderline Personality Disorder – or BPD – as defined in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic & Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR).

Borderline personality disorder (BDP) in young adults is characterized by extreme behaviors, alternating moods and sometimes, thoughts of suicide.

Many young adults suffering from borderline personality disorder experience extreme shifts in behavior when they are unable to tolerate negative emotions. Young adults react in many different ways; from uncontrollable anger and cutting to feelings of loneliness and the engagement in sexual intercourse.

CHARACTERISTICS & TRAITS

The following are a few of the most commonly observed behaviors and traits of those that are suffering from mood regulation issues.

- Alienation

- Anger Depression
- Self-Harm
- Self-Loathing
- Sense of Entitlement

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Young adults who are diagnosed with mood regulation issues often require some form of medication. However, this should not be thought of as being the only answer or solution. Many young adults are suggested to participate in some form of behavior therapy in addition to their medication.

Behavioral therapy often incorporates intensive individual and group therapy sessions. Individual therapy sessions focus on addressing a set of issues that are immediate and necessary, and other behaviors that disrupt healthy living.

Another form of treatment that promotes real and long-lasting change has been wilderness therapy programs. At Pacific Quest, young adults who join our program learn to have greater control over their emotions through individual and group therapy. The natural surroundings provide young adults a sense of calmness—through various challenges and experiences—and gain a sense of empowerment and self-confidence.

If you feel your young adults, or another individual, could benefit from the Pacific Quest Wilderness Therapy Program or if you have a question about our therapeutic model, contact us at 808-937-5806 today.