

Using Humor to Cope with Bipolar Disorder

People with bipolar disorder and their loved ones often have a great sense of humor, perhaps because they tend to be smarter than average or because bipolar disorder creates situations that appear to have been written for the theater of the absurd. Here are a few of the absurdities that can leave you shaking your head or shaking in laughter:

- * During a hypomanic episode, you have inflated self-esteem, increased energy, decreased need for sleep, increased creativity, and increased goal-directed activity. You're also likely to feel powerful and sexy. And you're expected to take medication to make that *go away?!*
- * Almost all medications that effectively treat bipolar mania lead to weight gain, and the one medication commonly prescribed to help, topiramate (Topamax), can negatively affect cognitive function. So you have a choice — you can be hungry or confused.
- * People experiencing a mental breakdown are often required to sign legal papers in order to be admitted to the hospital. Seriously?! How can these documents *possibly* be legally binding?
- * Lack of insight, a common symptom of bipolar mania, prevents a person from recognizing symptoms. Everybody knows this. Yet, nearly everyone gets upset with you when you can't agree with them that something is wrong.
- * You tell people you're seriously ill and you beg for help, but because you *look* okay — no open wounds or other signs of physical illness and you can walk and talk — they think nothing is wrong. Who's the one *lacking insight?!*
- * The emergency room doctor refuses to give you the medication you need to come down from a bipolar high, because he wants the psychiatrist to be able to observe the symptoms for herself. Can't he just tell her?

These situations are all based on incidents that occurred. Yet, they barely scratch the surface of the absurdities that people with bipolar and their loved ones often face, particularly when psychosis enters the picture.

Of course, bipolar disorder can cause intense and very real suffering. An “innocent little fling” triggered by mania can destroy marriages and friendships. Mania can drive people to spend or gamble away their family's life savings . . . and then some. Both mania and depression can ruin a person's career and place a huge financial burden on

all involved. Everyone is well aware of all the bad, ugly things that bipolar can do, but retaining a sense of humor through it all can help you weather the emotional storm.