

Module 5: Managing Mood Swings

REACT online Toolkit info sheet

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Being a friend to someone who has extreme mood swings can be challenging. In this module we suggest some things that you as a relative can do that might help. These are based on our own experiences and those of relatives we have talked to. We can't promise they will all work every time, but we think they are worth a go. There are more ideas at www.react.nhs.uk and a forum to share suggestions with other relatives.

Support a Relapse Prevention or Staying Well Plan

Relapse Prevention and Staying Well Plans are useful for any mental health problem that fluctuates over time. Ideally a relapse prevention plan should be done with a health professional, who can also look out for early signs and be part of the plan to manage these. Ask your Care Coordinator or GP if you want to know more.

The important steps are:

- Identify and manage common triggers
- Spot early warning signs of changes in mental health
- Develop coping strategies to manage early warning signs and prevent them getting worse
- Understand what things keep us feeling well and make sure we do them

You can help with this plan in the following ways:

1. Anticipate the kind of events that trigger relapses and offer additional support at these times – eg work stress, relationship breakups etc.
2. Learn to spot early signs of a mood swing.
3. Be part of a Relapse Prevention Plan to manage early signs when they do occur. This might include how to communicate if you spot early signs, and what to do if a more severe mood episode develops.
4. Support regular social rhythms including sleep / wake times, eating and daily structure.



Your Early Intervention team can make sure you get access to the REACT online toolkit



www.reactnhs.uk

Department of Health Disclaimer:

The views and opinions expressed therein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the HTA, NIHR, NHS or the Department of Health.

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Being part of a Relapse Prevention or staying well plan can help your relative stay well, and can help you feel better because you know what to look out for and what to do if you are concerned.

You can only be part of a relapse prevention plan if your relative wants you to be which may change over time. If not, then it is likely that your attempts to get involved will lead to arguments and problems in your relationship. If this happens, you might try and agree that even if you are not involved in developing the plan, that you have contact details for the health professional and can contact them if you are concerned about a mood swing.

Try to Create a Low Stress Environment

There is now a lot of evidence that people with mental health problems are more likely to relapse if they live in households where there are a lot of arguments or they feel criticised. This kind of environment raises stress levels which can trigger mood swings.

Of course, it's easy to recommend this but often very hard to do. We all get cross and frustrated with each other at times. A few things that might help create a low stress environment include:

1. **Take time out.** If you feel yourself getting into an argument then just leave the situation and give yourself time to calm down.
2. **Acceptance is key.** When someone you love is unwell you naturally want them get better as quickly as possible. Accepting that you cannot make the mood swings disappear is difficult but important. Accepting that your relative is doing their best to manage their moods, even if their attempts don't seem to be working, is also important. This acceptance can free you up to provide support to help your relative recover in the time they need to do this.
3. **Hunt for the positives.** Being praised for doing something makes us feel great and more likely to do it again. Looking for small improvements and giving positive feedback on these can be very helpful, especially when someone is low in mood.
4. **Draw on the good times.** Bipolar disorder is a fluctuating condition. When things are bad it can be helpful to recall times when things were better, and to remember that the mood swings do come and go and that things will improve again.

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