



**with you through the highs & lows**

# **BIPOLAR DISORDER**

## **Information for Employers**

It may be that you don't know much about bipolar disorder but are faced with employing someone who has it or have an existing employee with the condition. You may have lots of questions such as: Will the person have lots of time off sick? Will I need special support systems? Are there some jobs the person can't do? We have a stressful environment, will they cope? This booklet aims to address employers' concerns about employing someone with bipolar disorder.

### ***What is bipolar disorder?***

Bipolar disorder is an episodic mood disorder which affects 2-3% of the population in the UK. It is a recognised and treatable medical condition. For more information on bipolar disorder read Bipolar Scotland's *Living with Bipolar Disorder* booklet <http://www.bipolarscotland.org.uk/leaflets/living-with-bipolar-disorder.pdf>

### ***The legal context***

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a duty to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all their employees. Employees must co-operate with and implement their employer's policies with regard to health and safety.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 place a duty on employers to assess the health and safety risks faced by their employees at work, including stress.

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against employees who fall within the protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. In the case of disability, this involves making reasonable adjustments to ensure that the disabled person is not at a substantial disadvantage to other employees. Long term illness due to or made worse by stress at work may constitute such a disability. In addition, employers must not treat fixed term or part time employees less favourably than permanent or full time employees.

The Equality Act 2010 states that a person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long

term adverse effect on her/his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to discriminate at any stage of the work relationship: pre-employment, employment and post-employment. Everything from the initial job advertisement through to providing references post-employment is covered.

A range of workers are covered by the Equality Act 2010, not just employees but apprentices, zero hour contract workers, self employed consultants, job applicants and more. The Act applies to all employers.

Types of unlawful conduct include: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, discrimination by association, discrimination by perception, combined discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Visit these sites for more information on the Equality Act 2010 <https://www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance> and <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act>

### ***When someone tells you he or she has bipolar disorder***

It is extremely difficult for someone to approach their employer or potential employer and explain that they have bipolar disorder. Traditionally there has been a stigma attached to mental health, and especially severe mental illnesses, which persists to this day which people with mental health problems have to challenge and overcome on a day to day basis. As a result of this stigma, people with mental health problems face prejudice on a regular basis. Try to listen to your employee with an open mind. Bear in mind how difficult it is to declare that you have the condition and that here is someone who needs your help and support.

### ***Reasonable Adjustments in the Workplace***

It may be that this disclosure leads to making workplace adjustments for that person to perform well in the post. Asking them if they are having any issues and what they need is the best way to learn about what adjustments need to be made. Bear in

mind that bipolar disorder is an episodic illness and therefore an adjustment may be needed during a period of ill health but not at other times. Some adjustments may be needed all the time. An example of this may be that someone on long term medication may suffer from a perpetual dry mouth. A water cooler would be a good way to deal with this and at the same time would benefit other employees. Not all adjustments have a financial cost attached; most are free such as variations in start and finish times and moving someone's work station to a better position. The average cost of an adjustment is £75 and grants are available from Jobcentre Plus's Access to Work Scheme. Try reading "Making Reasonable Adjustments at Work for People with Mental Health Problems" written by SAMH [http://www.samh.org.uk/media/296324/ras\\_2012\\_pink.pdf](http://www.samh.org.uk/media/296324/ras_2012_pink.pdf) or [http://www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/images/library/files/Government%20policy/Mental\\_Health\\_Adjustments\\_Guidance\\_May\\_2012.pdf](http://www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/images/library/files/Government%20policy/Mental_Health_Adjustments_Guidance_May_2012.pdf) which gives advice for employers on workplace adjustments for mental health conditions.

### ***Workplace Stress***

The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) definition of stress is "the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them".

The most common causes of work stress and mental health problems are increased work intensity, less security, less autonomy, target driven work cultures, bullying and harassment. This applies to everyone, not just people with bipolar disorder.

Much can be done to reduce stress in the workforce in the long term:

- reorganise poor working processes
- empower staff to increase control over their own work
- include employees in decision making and problem solving processes
- balance efforts and rewards

- improve communication and feedback
- state clear roles and expectations
- encourage and strengthen social support
- provide opportunities for further training and qualifications

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has identified six key areas or risk factors that can be causes of stress at work:

- ❖ the demands of your job
- ❖ your control over your work
- ❖ the support you receive from managers and colleagues
- ❖ your relationships at work
- ❖ your role in the organisation
- ❖ change and how it's managed

HSE has produced Management Standards for organisations to aim towards. There is one standard for each risk factor. The target is for all organisations to match the performance of the top 20% of employers that are successfully minimising work-related stress. To meet the standards employers will have to assess the risk and potential causes of stress in the organisation; assess how the organisation is performing in relation to the six risk factors; and consult and decide on improvement targets and action plans.

In addition, the International Stress Management Association (ISMA) exists to promote sound knowledge and best practice in the prevention, reduction and management of personal and work related stress. Visit [www.isma.org.uk](http://www.isma.org.uk) for more information.

You can also visit [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) and [www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk) and [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress) for further information.

### ***A mentally healthy workforce***

A 2004 study found that health promotion programmes led to an average 34% drop in absenteeism and concluded that every £1

spent on promoting health could save employers £2.50. A mentally healthy workforce is more productive, has lower staff turnover and lower absences. As well as saving money, promoting mental health can help with staff morale, working relationships and corporate image. Creating an environment where people can talk openly about their mental health, providing information on mental health in a variety of ways and working towards a Healthy Working Lives award are all positive steps to take towards a mentally healthy workforce. Visit <http://www.healthyworkinglives.com/award> for information about the award.

### ***Will the person have lots of time off sick?***

Going back to our original questions, having long periods off sick is not the best way to manage every episode. If you have invested in making your business a mentally healthy workplace and a place where people feel comfortable talking about their mental health and identifying stressors then the chances are that the episode can be identified at an early stage. Prolonged periods of time off are unlikely to be the best solution at this early stage. Reduced working hours, a change or reduction in duties, changes to start and finish times and other adjustments may mean that the person can work in some capacity and this work-based recovery approach can maintain the person's confidence, motivation and sense of identity, and ultimately help the person recover. Research shows that if employees with mental health problems are supported they become more loyal, engaged and motivated.

### ***Will I need to put special support systems in place?***

You may need to make some workplace adjustments and perhaps take a different approach to mental health and stress but this should all be accommodated within existing structures such as occupational health and supervisory systems. Remember help is available from the Department of Work and Pensions towards the cost of workplace adjustments. What may be more of a challenge is changing people's attitudes to mental health within your workplace but strong leadership on this will help enormously.

- Prioritise your workload by writing a list of what needs to be done
- Try not to work long hours or take work home with you
- Identify what will help you at work to stay well and if you feel changes should be made, ask for them
- Look at your company's policies and schemes to see what might be helpful to you

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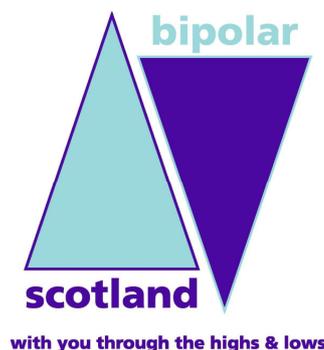
Bipolar Scotland was established in 1994 as a Company Limited by Guarantee and a Scottish Charity. Initially known as Manic Depression Fellowship Scotland the name was changed to Bipolar Fellowship Scotland in 2004 and subsequently in 2010 to Bipolar Scotland.

Bipolar Scotland is “user led” with the Board of Directors comprising people with bipolar disorder and carers. Bipolar Scotland is run from a central office based in Paisley and provides various services to members and others who have been affected by bipolar disorder. To date this has included an information service, production of leaflets/booklets and a quarterly newsletter, On the Level. The organisation supports an ever growing network of self help groups throughout Scotland, and delivers self management training to people who have experienced bipolar disorder. Bipolar Scotland also provides awareness training and talks to external organisations.

Bipolar Scotland is represented on a number of national forums that cover mental health, social care and research into bipolar disorder.

### *Vision Statement*

Bipolar Scotland’s vision statement is to enhance the quality of life of people with bipolar disorder and their carers, including friends and relatives, by offering appropriate support at both individual and group level.



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