



The Entertainment Industries Council, Inc. (EIC)

First Draft Service



presents...

a series of "tip sheet" emails with information and depiction suggestions on **BIPOLAR DISORDER**. Hopefully, these will not only be the impetus for fresh story ideas, but will also imbue scripts with a realistic and accurate portrayal of bipolar disorder. They are designed to enhance the creative process -- not limit it.

WHAT IS BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Bipolar disorder, also called manic depression, involves periods of depression but also periods of mania. Manic episodes can include excessive energy, inappropriately elevated moods and/or risky behavior. It is also probably the most commonly misunderstood and, therefore, misdiagnosed mental illness.

Major depressive disorder—many of us refer to it as "depression"— and bipolar disorder have many symptoms in common. However, they are ***two different conditions that require different treatments***. Many people being treated for depression are actually dealing with bipolar disorder—and may be misdiagnosed, because they haven't recognized the symptoms. In fact, one study showed many patients with bipolar disorder initially received an incorrect diagnosis of depression. ([*Is It Really Depression?*, 2005](#))

****DEPICTION SUGGESTIONS****

- ❑ Since treatments for depression and manic depression are different, consider depicting how misdiagnosis can exacerbate symptoms.
- ❑ Try to show the full range of symptoms and /or emotions associated with bipolar disorder—this includes not only serious depression that can lead to suicidal tendencies, but also extended periods of elation, excessive energy, and reckless behavior that may result.
- ❑ Consider showing how a person with bipolar disorder may put his or herself in great danger during manic episodes. Such dangers could include unprotected sex, drug use, injection drug use, reckless driving, overspending etc.
- ❑ Try to keep in mind that bipolar disorder, depression, schizophrenia and other mental illnesses have strong stigma associated with them, often prompting people to ignore their symptoms, putting themselves in danger. Think about ways to show how stigma associated with mental

illnesses can cause people to suffer more than is necessary, and how treatment by knowledgeable experts can relieve many of the symptoms of most mental illnesses.

- ❑ People with family histories of bipolar disorder are at a greater risk of suffering from the illness. Consider showing how families can be affected, including the person or people suffering from the disorder and those who do not.

- ❑ People across all gender, race, ethnicity, social class lines are at risk for bipolar disorder. Yet, people in specific populations, especially those in lower economic groups or immigrants who may not understand English-language health news, are less likely to seek treatment because they may not know it is available to them. If you are dealing with characters included in one of these groups, consider showing how they might deal with their health problems, and how treatments are available.

[Click here for more information and depiction suggestions.](#)

****SOME RELEVANT INFORMATION****

- ❑ An estimated 3.7% of Americans suffer from at least one form of bipolar disorder. ([Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 2003](#))
- ❑ Studies show that 80% - 90% of those who suffer from bipolar disorder have relatives with some form of depression. ([National Mental Health Association, 2000](#))
- ❑ The average age at onset for a first manic episode is the early twenties. ([National Institute of Mental Health, 2001](#))
- ❑ *As many as one in five patients with bipolar disorder completes suicide.* ([DBS Alliance, 2003](#))
- ❑ Like other mental illnesses, bipolar disorder cannot yet be identified physiologically—for example, through a blood test or a brain scan. A diagnosis of bipolar disorder is made on the basis of symptoms, course of illness, and, when available, family history, including screening questions on MDQ. ([National Institute of Mental Health, 2001](#))
- ❑ Unlike many adults with bipolar disorder, whose episodes tend to be more clearly defined, children and young adolescents with the illness often experience very fast mood swings between depression and mania many times within a day. Therefore, children or adolescents with emotional and behavioral symptoms should be carefully evaluated by a mental health professional because effective treatment depends on appropriate diagnosis. ([Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1997](#))
- ❑ Symptoms of a Manic Episode:
 - Excessively "high," overly good, euphoric mood
 - Extreme irritability
 - Increased energy, activity, and restlessness
 - Racing thoughts and talking very fast, jumping from one idea to another
 - Distractibility, can't concentrate well
 - Little sleep needed
 - Unrealistic beliefs in one's abilities and powers
 - Poor judgment
 - Spending sprees
 - A lasting period of behavior that is different from usual
 - Increased sexual drive
 - Abuse of drugs, particularly cocaine, alcohol, and sleeping medications
 - Provocative, intrusive, or aggressive behavior
 - Denial that anything is wrong

(National Institute of Mental Health, 2001)

Bipolar disorder is treatable, and recovery is possible.
- National Mental Health Association

For more expert consultation on bipolar disorder: [First Draft Service](#)

For more information on bipolar disorder: www.isitreallydepression.com



If you do not wish to receive further depiction tip sheets, please email jkim@eiconline.org, with "remove tip sheet list" in the subject of your email.