

Family-Focused Therapy as Early Intervention for Youth at Risk for Bipolar Disorder

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The Colorado Family Project, based at the University of Colorado, Boulder's Psychology Department, is conducting a study of the effectiveness of family treatment for youths with mood swings who have a family history of bipolar disorder. Participating families will be randomly assigned (a procedure like tossing a coin) to receive 12 sessions of a family educational treatment (information about how to cope with mood disorders and use effective communication and problem-solving skills) or a brief family educational treatment (one diagnostic feedback session, a self-care workbook, and the option of three more family sessions if needed). Both treatments will be administered by trained clinicians, and are educational and focused on helping family members and youths to understand and cope with mood swings, develop plans for preventing children's moods from getting worse, communicate more effectively, and solve family problems.

Participation in the study lasts for one year. Children and adolescents are first interviewed by a psychiatrist affiliated with the study. Medication treatments are then determined by the clinical needs of the youth. Taking medications is not required to be in the study, but youth who are admitted to the program will get one year of free psychiatric sessions with a study-affiliated psychiatrist. In addition to family treatment, participating youths and their parents take part in regular research interviews and fill out questionnaires concerning their individual and family functioning. The family receives compensation for each of these research visits. There are no monetary costs for the program.

Families may participate if (a) they have a child or teenager between the ages of 9 and 17 who has had significant mood swings (highs and/or lows) that have caused problems for him/her or the family, and (b) at least one parent or sibling of the youth has bipolar disorder. Your child cannot be simultaneously in weekly individual or family therapy with another provider, or have substance misuse or alcohol problems that require immediate treatment.

If you are interested or know someone who might be interested, please contact David J. Miklowitz, Ph.D., at (303) 492-8575 or miklowitz@colorado.edu, or Elizabeth George, Ph.D., at (303) 207-1161 or at egeorge@psych.colorado.edu.