

## Mood Disorder Introduction for Schools

When children with mood disorders are not experiencing active symptoms, much of their ability to maintain stability comes down to stamina, which can ebb and flow throughout the school day and/or the school year.

While this statement is something of a simplification, it's helpful framing for understanding children with mood disorders because we all experience changes in our stamina levels. For example, when anyone is tired, hungry, under pressure, or feeling anxious, their ability to successfully manage the environment becomes challenged.

Imagine for a moment how you would handle getting a flat tire when you are well rested, well fed, financially secure, and not in any particular hurry to get anywhere. This situation would likely be frustrating, but you'd probably manage it calmly.

Now imagine how you would handle that flat tire if you hadn't slept the previous few nights, hadn't eaten all day, were seriously strapped for cash, and were on your way to an important meeting with an unsympathetic boss. This scenario would likely feel overwhelming, and require far more emotional and physical energy to manage.

Kids with mood disorders, bipolar disorder, and Fear of Harm are more or less functioning in a version of that second scenario *all the time*, while trying to keep up with their school peers. Seemingly simple tasks such as sitting at a desk, eating lunch with friends, and understanding and then following instructions from teachers take *far more emotional and physical energy* for them, challenging their stamina all day long.

The more depleted children with mood disorders become, the more difficult it is for them to maintain stability and to meet the demands placed on them in school.

So, the first step in helping these students is through the use of accommodations that allow them to *rest, replenish, and renew their energy* whenever possible. Acceptance and encouragement to do so from teachers and staff is essential to this process.

The Educational Needs Summary and the Symptoms and Accommodations sheets available for download from our website are a general guide for schools. Specific adjustments will, of course, need to be made for each individual student.