



Differentiation Between ADHD and Pediatric Bipolar Disorder

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The symptoms of Bipolar Disorder in children may be similar to those of ADHD, often making diagnosis confusing and difficult. Since both can adversely impact social and academic development, early intervention is critical. Misdiagnosis can mean a poorer prognosis due to delayed or ineffective treatment. The following table describes key differentiating symptoms.

Bipolar Disorder	ADHD
Discrete changes in mood	Fairly consistent mood
Elevated, expansive mood; in constant motion	Abundant energy, hyperactivity, but no expansive mood
Racing thoughts, flight of ideas	Distractibility but greater stability of thought
Rapid, driven pressured speech	Excessive talking that is not rapid or pressured
Intense early sexual interest and behavior	Sexual interest that is more age appropriate
Seeks high risk situations	Engages in risky behavior without awareness of danger
Psychosis or grossly distorted perceptions of reality	No psychosis or gross distortion of reality
Decreased need for sleep; during manic mood does not feel drowsy and tired when sleep deprived	Inability to sleep; feels drowsy and tired when sleep deprived
Rage/meltdown triggered by limit-setting more often than sensory or emotional overstimulation	Rage/meltdown triggered by sensory or emotional overstimulation
Often has no memory of events during rage/meltdown	Usually remembers events during rage/meltdown
Deliberate destructiveness or violence triggered by anger or limit setting	Destructiveness due primarily to carelessness; less likely to be violent
Family history of bipolar disorder or depression	Family history of attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder or depression
Usually excels in verbal and artistic skills	Less likely to excel in verbal and artistic skills
Grandiosity; overestimation of ability during manic mood	No grandiosity or tendency to overestimate ability
Psychostimulants (Ritalin, Adderral, etc.) used to treat ADHD make behavior worse	Psychostimulants (Ritalin, Adderral, etc.) used to treat ADHD improve behavior