

The journey has begun. Your child has been diagnosed with a brain disorder. It seems like every time you visit the doctor you come home with a whole new set of initials. ADHD, OCD, ODD, CD, Aspergers, Today it is Bipolar Disorder. Where does one go for help?

You have begun the process that could be called the diagnostic journey. It is a journey because as the diagnoses and symptoms change, the parents are a constant. It is possible that the child may have more than one diagnosis because the child's symptoms can change with the changes that are occurring in their bodies.

As parents begin this process there is a predictable cycle of emotions they experience. The first stage is: **Dealing with the news.** This is the stage where there is shock, denial, crisis, chaos and confusion. Common statements are, "That's it, the diagnoses are wrong," "If I just change this one behavior, it will all go back to normal." It feels like the world as you know it has disappeared.

Stage two is: **Learning to cope.** This stage can contain the feelings of anger, guilt, and resentment. It can be anger at the child, world, yourself. Sometimes it feels like, "What did I do to cause this?" Parents have made statements like, "Doesn't my child want to change?" "Why can't my child be perfect like my sister's?" "If I hadn't married into this family this wouldn't have happened?" "Why is my spouse's family so messed up?"

Grief is a key emotion of this stage. It is one that is felt often. "? What about the dreams we had for our child?" "Our child is so smart, how can this be happening?" "Will they ever live on their own?" "What happened to our child who used to be so happy?"

Trying to find answers is a tough journey. This stage can be felt numerous times. For every step forward sometimes it feels like two are back. A parent can move on past this stage and return here when the child develops a new symptom. This is a journey. Revisiting the stages is part of the process, not regression.

Sometime along the way, there is recognition. It sinks in. This is my life. It is not bad, it is not good. It is just how it is. It is a step towards healing.

Stage three is: **Moving Into Action.** This is the stage where a parent tries to find out as much about the illness as possible. As one learns about the illness, the anxiety and the mystery of it decrease. This can be accomplished by reading books, articles, attending classes, and by finding a support group. This cannot be emphasized enough. Finding out that you are not alone is like a breath of fresh air. It will help move parents forward towards acceptance. It is important to reaffirm, **"WE ARE NOT BAD PARENTS!"**

As parents move into action, they can begin to ask questions and become advocates for their child. They begin to ask, "What can I do?" Communication is an important part of the process. As parents begin to advocate for their child; talking with the school is crucial for the child's success. Give information to the school about the illness; ask the teachers how you can help make the transitions into the school easier for both the teacher and the child. It is imperative to build a partnership with the schools. It is not an adversarial relationship. Be cautious of making it so. Become a team player with the school.