

New Booklet Helps Children with Depression and Bipolar Disorder

NewsUSA

(NU) - If only all children could lead happy and fulfilling lives, but many don't. The reality is many children and adolescents live with depression and bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depression, which are real, treatable medical illnesses.

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, DBSA, and the Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation, CABF, have published a booklet for children. The booklet on depression and bipolar disorder is called, "The Storm in My Brain."

It tells them in child-friendly language how it feels to have depression and mania and includes artwork by children who have depression and bipolar disorder.

Suicide is discussed on a level that a young child can understand. The booklet provides tips for parents and teachers on how to support children living with these illnesses.

Symptoms of these illnesses are often initially mistaken for everyday emotions. Symptoms for depression that parents should look for include prolonged sadness, crying spells, or changes in appetite and sleep patterns. Symptoms of mania may include excessive irritability, racing speech and thoughts, or reckless behavior.

"Depression and bipolar disorder can be difficult to diagnose in anyone. This is particularly troubling for young people who are still developing, and it is important for loved ones to educate themselves about these illnesses in order to identify symptoms early," said Lydia Lewis, president of the

DBSA.

Depression strikes 3 percent of children and 12 percent of adolescents. An estimated 1 percent of young people live with bipolar disorder. "These illnesses are more common than people think. We need to increase awareness so that young people affected by them get the help that they need," said Martha Hellander, executive director of the CABF.

Parents play an instrumental role in recognizing the symptoms of these illnesses and should alert a physician immediately if they suspect their child may be experiencing symptoms. With depression, a child may lose interest in fun or refuse to go to school; a child with bipolar disorder be unable to get out of bed and, the next day, display aggressive behavior.

Parents should do the following:

- Keep a daily diary of your child's mood, energy, behavior, statements of concern, treatment response and sleep. Share this information with a doctor.

- Help your child maintain a routine for sleep, mealtimes and activities.

- Avoid bright lights, noise, large stores and groups, which can be over-stimulating.

For more information on depression and bipolar disorder or to find a support group, visit the DBSA Web site www.DBSAAlliance.org or the CABF Web site www.bpkids.org.

To obtain a copy of "The Storm in My Brain," call 1-800-826-3632 or download it from either organization's Web site.