

# KNOW YOUR STUDENT

FACT SHEETS TO GUIDE THE  
LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT  
OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS



## Bipolar Disorder

### Definition

Bipolar disorder (formerly known as manic depression) is included in the broad category of mental illness. It causes people to experience extreme moods occurring in cycles (phases / episodes) of mania and depression — 'highs and lows'.

Episodes of mania are characterised by rapid and disjointed thinking, fast speech, rapidly switching between topics in conversation, grandiose delusions or ideas, elation, over-activity, overeating, etc.

Depression, which sometimes follows an episode of mania, can present as negativity, lack of energy, lack of motivation, feelings of worthlessness or emptiness and sometimes is severe enough to produce suicidal feelings.

For further information see the fact sheet/s relating to **anxiety** and/or **depression**.

### Impact on training and assessment

The effects of bipolar vary enormously both between and within individuals depending on the phase of the illness and nature of the treatment. People in the 'high' phase may not acknowledge they have any need for medication and become extremely difficult to manage in a highly structured learning environment.

Learners may experience difficulties with:

- anxiety;
- concentration;
- distorted perception;
- short term memory;
- effects of medication.

### Delivery and assessment strategies

The following strategies are suggestions. Each student with bipolar disorder will have their own individual support and learning needs and it's recommended as a first step, that you ask them and/or their family or support network (if such a network is present and accessible) what the best ways to support their learning is.

# KNOW YOUR STUDENT

When liaising with anyone other than the student directly, ensure you maintain confidentiality, as per TAFE Queensland Privacy Policy.

## **Presenting and communicating information**

- Make your expectations clear about all aspects of training including standards of work and assessment requirements.
- Review progress, goals and learner expectations periodically.
- Offer flexible training delivery e.g. electronic media for learners who may be unable to attend on-campus delivery.
- Encourage the student to take frequent breaks if needed.
- Minimise any requirements regarding oral presentations if the student feels uncomfortable.
- Give oral as well as written feedback to avoid misunderstanding and anxiety.

## **Utilising technology to maximize student engagement**

- A reader/scribe can assist learners with reading and writing material.
- Learning materials and information can be converted into formats that are accessible for the learner e.g. audio files (such as MP3 format), Braille (a tactile reading and writing code, which is read using the fingers) or large print.
- Screen reading software such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS) reads electronic material aloud to the user. It provides audible access to electronic information, software applications and the internet.
- Electronic magnification devices are available in portable, transportable, desktop and laptop based forms. They magnify or scan print based materials and objects.
- Magnification software (e.g. Microsoft Magnifier, ZoomText) enlarges the whole computer screen including text and application buttons / navigation.
- Anti-glare screens and reducing the brightness or changing the contrast of computer screens can benefit.
- Connect (also referred to as Desire2Learn) has numerous options to increase accessibility to information provided within Connect. Options such as screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, colour contrast accessibility features and zooming options are all available within Connect. Educators can access information about these options at <https://connect.tafeqld.edu.au/shared/help/student/content/en/Accessibility.html>.
- Audio recording of training delivery or note taking (a person or digital note taker such as the Neo Notetaker) to assist learners with handwriting difficulties and / or with mishearing and misquoting.

# KNOW YOUR STUDENT

- A Disability Coach or Disability Support Worker can assist the learner with planning and organizing. The benefit to requesting a Disability Coach/Support Worker is that they may be able to look holistically at the support and learning needs of the student and provide some helpful ideas regarding software, or education strategies to help increase the student's understanding, participation and engagement.

## **All of the delivery strategies may be of assistance for assessment**

- Arrange additional time for assessments and tests, if required.
- Plan for a separate assessment room to reduce anxiety, if required.
- Defer or delay assessment while a learner is clearly experiencing the active phase of their illness.

## **References**

- Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training, <http://www.adcet.edu.au>
- Sane Australia, [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

## **Further Resources**

- Beyond Blue (2016), <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/bipolar-disorder>
- Reach Out (2016), <http://au.reachout.com/bipolar-disorder>
- Black Dog Institute (2016), <http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/public/bipolar-disorder/>