



Speaking from Experience Bipolar Disorder

Transcript for chapter 4 of 9: Family and friends

Eva (6 years since diagnosis): I think it is very difficult for families of people with Bipolar. Certainly prior to diagnosis, when they don't know what's going on it's very hard. I know my father sort of wanted me to try to employ strategies to cope with my manic episodes and to monitor my behaviour.

Bill (6 years since diagnosis): When I wasn't so well, I kept away from my friends and they kept away from me. When I came good again - because I think we went to church socials, any dance or something - you wouldn't talk the people you knew, you would just go and see somebody you didn't know. And you could talk as though things were alright, see. You felt comfortable.

Richard (18 years since diagnosis): You need some boundaries and you need someone who is literally saying, "Listen, there's your medication. I realise you're not eight years old, but it's time to have it, and I'm going to stand here until you've had it. And here's the water, and off you go."

Margaret (Eva's mother): I've talked to other mothers and fathers who said the same thing - you often find yourself saying, "I wish it would happen to me. I wish I could take it away from the child and I wish I could go through it instead of having to watch the child go through it."

Bill: But they began to understand through mum that dad was going through sickness. One day we hope that eventually he'll be a lot better, and that he'll be natural again. And especially with little children, when grandpa and grandchildren... little children would come and I wasn't well and they'd just keep at a distance. But when I got well, they'd be all over me. You know, jump on you and everything.

David and Donné (2 years since Donné's diagnosis): You go through it as a parent who has Bipolar, you can go through an awful lot of whipping yourself about my children. What's the point? You have a condition. All you can resolve to do is deal with it in the best way possible. And the best way possible is... and I'm lucky, I have relatives who are supportive and we do communicate. I mean, I know for a lot of people, they don't have that. They don't have a husband who is as understanding as David.

Richard: It's like that thing they often talk about in America where there sometimes has got to be a bit of that tough love. Where, you know, someone says, "No, we're not just providing a net or a network underneath you, but we're actually providing a few walls around you so that you can't just go off on a tangent and not get away with maybe not having your medication for a long time." And I know in recent times, when I went through a very difficult period, I hadn't taken medication for twelve months. Well, that was just plain stupid. In recent times I have spent a bit of time at my parents' place and I was very lucky that they were there and they were willing to help out, and I suppose act a bit like a nursing staff.

Eva: My parents have been really, really important in my whole, I guess I don't know if you would call it the recovery, but the treatment of my illness, right from the beginning.



Particularly my mother, because I live with her. But she was also supportive and she was perhaps the only person who noticed that my moods were very much related to my hormonal cycle.

Margaret: But at the same time, manic depression is a funny thing because you do have periods of normalcy between the downs and the ups. You know, there would be days when it was just like old times. And every time that happened I think we both, both my elder daughter and I, we would look each other and say, "Eva's back." And we would hope that it wasn't going to happen again, even though this was a monthly cycle. So we really did know, after a few times round, that it was going to happen again.

Richard: It's almost like, in a way, you need a pit crew, you know, for your racing car. And you're the car, rather than the driver. And different people have got to do different things at different times, and it shouldn't be left just to one person, hopefully, to do everything. Because then they can get burnt out themselves.

David and Donné: Well, towards me there was extreme hostility. I was the focus of everything that was ever wrong in her life. And I mean extreme, to the point of rage. And there was also an aspect of, what I called at the time, the 'Mother Theresa' syndrome where she was going to solve everybody's problems and save everybody from themselves.

Richard: Well I think it's, not surprisingly, really tough for the people, particularly when you're down, I would say. Because occasionally you'll have those moments where you're thinking life's not worth living. So you'll have people at times wondering is he or isn't he going to try something, you know, permanent? Silly, as they say. And that can cause great worry for people who are close to you.

Margaret: If couples are confronted with something like this you've got to work together. It can be very divisive. When they don't know what it is, mental illness and a child behaving strangely can often make people tend to blame one another. And obviously it's not useful, and usually the truth is, it's not your fault.

Eva: Once I started listening to my parents particularly and my sister and people around me who know, better than I did really, when I was getting manic, I could work with them.