

School's Stresses Can Trigger Mood Disorders

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(PhysOrg.com) -- With the school year kicking into full gear, mood disorders such as bipolar disorder and depression can start to manifest themselves -- and parents need to be on the lookout for them in their children.

Now that the first few weeks of the new school year are over, many parents are breathing a justifiable sigh of relief.

But just because the household has settled into a routine and those “first day of school” jitters are over, it doesn’t mean there’s smooth sailing until next summer, UC Health psychiatry specialists warn.

“This is the time when we start seeing the stress of school have its full

effect,” says Melissa DelBello, MD, a UC Health psychiatrist and co-director of the Division of Bipolar Disorders Research at the University of Cincinnati (UC) [psychiatry](#) department. “There is often a honeymoon period in the first few weeks after school begins, since part of the time is spent on review, and at first, most children are happy to see their friends again.”

But once school kicks into full gear, she says, mood disorders such as [bipolar disorder](#) and depression can start to manifest themselves—and parents need to be on the lookout for them in their children.

“Once school gets under way in earnest, there’s a lot of possibility that kids will get more irritable and have [depression](#) and often anxiety,” she says. “That could manifest with explosive episodes such as temper tantrums, or extreme mood swings.”

Few teenagers, of course, are immune to temper tantrums and mood swings. But DelBello points out that there’s a difference between normal teenage behavior and a [mood](#) disorder that could be helped with successful treatment.

“I think the key is functional impairment,” she says. “If adolescents (ages 12-18) are not functioning in their role of going to school and achieving what they need to in school or with their peers or with their family, that’s when it becomes a problem. And that’s not normal teenage behavior.”

The first step in treatment, DelBello says, is a comprehensive diagnostic assessment. “That’s the key,” she says. “We put a great deal of effort into doing a thorough assessment up front.

“Once we have the initial assessment completed, it becomes a lot easier to plan an optimal course of treatment for the child and his or her family.”

That treatment, she says, may consist of psychotherapy or medication, or a combination of the two.

“Certainly, many children and adolescents can be irritable or moody,” DelBello says. “But when in doubt, trust your instincts—and don’t hesitate to seek help.”

Provided by University of Cincinnati ([news](#) : [web](#))

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