

What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say

Most advice about supporting someone with bipolar disorder is written by clinicians. This is written by the person who was being supported — including during the stretches when I made it very hard.

SAY THIS

- ☐ “I’m here. You don’t have to explain it to me.”
- ☐ “What would actually help right now?”
- ☐ “I’m not going anywhere.”
- ☐ “Do you want me to just sit with you?”
- ☐ “I noticed you haven’t been sleeping. How are you doing?”
- ☐ “Can we make a plan for if this gets worse?” (ask on a good day)

NOT THIS

- ☐ “Just think positive.”
- ☐ “Everyone gets moody sometimes.”
- ☐ “You seemed fine yesterday.”
- ☐ “Are you off your meds?” — as an accusation, not a question
- ☐ “You don’t seem bipolar.”
- ☐ Calling the weather, or your own indecision, “bipolar”

DURING A MANIC EPISODE

- ☐ Don’t argue with the certainty — you will not win the argument
- ☐ Protect sleep however you can; sleep loss makes everything worse
- ☐ Watch for risky spending, driving, and impulsive decisions
- ☐ Reduce noise, light, and stimulation where possible
- ☐ Call their treatment team. If there is danger, call emergency services

IF THEY PUSH YOU AWAY

- ☐ It is very often the illness, not a verdict on your relationship
- ☐ During my worst episode I was certain a gift from my fiancé was poisoned
- ☐ He had done nothing. Paranoia rewrote what an ordinary kindness meant
- ☐ Keep showing up anyway. Presence does most of the work

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF TOO

- ☐ NAMI runs free Family-to-Family programs built specifically for you
- ☐ Supporters who get no support run out. This is not optional
- ☐ You are allowed to have limits and to say so plainly

This is one person’s experience, not medical advice. If someone is in immediate danger, call 988 (US) or your local emergency number.