

## MOODS

Everyone is moody from time to time. It is psychologically impossible – and even undesirable – to be constantly on an even keel. A head of cabbage experiences no fluctuations in mood, but human beings are subject to many nuances in their feelings and emotions.

During the course of a single day, you might experience many moods, both positive and negative. You may feel sad, insecure, nervous, annoyed, disgusted, frustrated, irritated, and disappointed, as well as proud, excited, happy, cheerful, and loving.

That's a list of normal everyday mood variations. But suppose that instead of experiencing some annoyance you become enraged, and in place of some slight nervousness you feel panicky – then you would have entered a potentially abnormal area. The intensity of the reaction is the important aspect of the mood.

There is a large difference between normal sadness and abnormal depression, between happiness and elation, and between irritation and rage. It is important that we can distinguish between depression and normal melancholy.

Some people think that being moody is the equivalent of being manic-depressive or, as it is now called, bi-polar disorder. In fact there are many levels of moodiness from being emotional, to being moody in a way that does not affect one's life, to being moody to a degree that it does affect one's relationships, to being moody to such a degree that you need help, to being moody to such a degree that one is what they call cyclo-thymic (that is having ups and downs not quite severe enough to warrant treatment for bi-polar disorder) to having full-blown bi-polar disorder.

Certain personality types are moody by nature. We all know the dramatic histrionic type personality whose life is always a few episodes short of being a full soap opera. They tend to be emotionally intense, dramatic, and moody. You can see this in children as much as adults. This is not abnormal – rather it just reflects a personality style. However, for most people ups and downs are to be expected but we need to be watchful of moods that become unduly intense or prolonged.

Generally moods can be tied to circumstances or situations. "I am disappointed and in a bad mood because my husband was late and I was looking forward to a pleasant evening" is different than concluding that "I am deeply hurt and betrayed because my husband was late".

In everyday family life we are all familiar with the moods of others. Moods are readily detected non-verbally. I bet you are familiar with how your partner "Puts on a face" to indicate that he is upset. You will only need to walk into the room and see his face to know that he is in a mood. The mood usually relates to some annoyance, irritation, disappointment, or hurt that he finds difficult to verbalise. Others show their moods by making noise (clattering the dishes, banging doors, stomping up and down the stairs); others show their moodiness by sulking (withdrawing, being silent and sullen, whinging about things, etc.) Still others communicate their moodiness through hyperactivity

(cleaning out the cupboards, hovering the house top to bottom, enforcing house-tidying rules, etc).

We all know it and we all do it. Non-verbal expressions of moodiness leave us off the hook and allow us to indulge our mood before doing the inevitable problem-solving. Regretfully, however, for some people non-verbal sulking is their only way of communicating what's going on with them. Some people find it very difficult to sit down in a respectful and straight way and address a problem. They prefer the indirect punishment of being in a mood. "I might not get my way, but I'll annoy you with my moodiness!" is the undeclared position.

When moods become deep, last for days, and are difficult to change then there is a problem. As stated, some people are moody in order to punish while others are moody because they are unable to control their emotions – they might be the same way regardless of who is in the house.

If you find your own moodiness to be exaggerated or too intense, you need to take stock of what you are doing to yourself or others. Counselling can be of help in learning to understand the source and intent of such experience and behaviour. Oftentimes we need to step back and understand what is at stake in many situations that trigger moods. You may notice, for example, that you can trace your moods or moodiness right back to your childhood or teenage years and see that the same kinds of things trigger the same reactions in you.

Moods in which irrational thoughts and feelings seem to be racing out of control indicate the need to seek some council of confidant to help you get an understanding of what is happening. More often than not you are not manic-depressive and you can find new ways of approaching the everyday demands of your life.