



Which talk therapies work best for bipolar disorder in children and teens? An approach combining skill-building & education leads the list.

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A [new article](#) published this month in the *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology (JCCAP)* by Mary Fristad, Ph.D. and Heather MacPherson, MA, from the Ohio State University have conducted a careful review of the best psychological treatments for bipolar disorder in children and adolescents. Bipolar disorder affects around 2.5% of youths and causes significant and distressing impairment for these youth. A [brief video](#) with information for parents is available on www.effectivechildtherapy.com.

The authors examined more than a dozen peer-reviewed articles, a reflection of how few studies of youth bipolar disorder are available. Using a five level ranking system, with the first level representing treatments with the *best support* and the fifth level representing treatments with *no support*, the authors categorized four different treatment approaches. No treatments were ranked at Level 1 or best support. Family psychoeducation with skill building was ranked as “probably efficacious” treatments, the second highest ranking. This approach involves providing parents with information about the symptoms and course of mood disorders. As well, the approach provides instruction and practice of concrete skills (e.g., problem solving, communication skills) designed to help families manage and improve a child’s mood disorder symptoms. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) was found to be “possibly efficacious” (i.e., Level 3) Two treatments, dialectical behavior therapy and interpersonal and social rhythm therapy were listed as level 4 or “experimental” treatments, meaning that some early evidence has been reported for these two approaches. No other psychological treatment met scientific standards to suggest that it could reliably or meaningfully reduce symptoms of youth bipolar disorder.

For more information, interested readers can go to www.effectivechildtherapy.com. In addition, the website offers free videos on a variety of child/adolescent therapy topics, including an extended video describing [evidence-based approaches for bipolar in children and adolescents](#) presented by the study’s author, Dr. Mary Fristad.

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