

BIPOLAR SERVICE: GUIDELINES FOR REFERRERS

The Bipolar Service is a specialist secondary care service within Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust (BSMHFT). The service supports individuals with episodes of high mood and/or fluctuations between high and low mood, irrespective of diagnosis. Individuals with a diagnosis of Bipolar disorder, Cyclothymia, Schizoaffective disorder, or a history of clear fluctuations in mood may benefit from being referred to our service.



The Bipolar Service offers the Mood on Track (MoT) programme, which is a cognitive behavioural psychological intervention which was designed specifically for service users with bipolar disorder. The programme incorporates elements of Social Rhythm Therapy, and a Behavioural Family Therapy (BFT) framework within a psychoeducation approach. The MoT course aims to improve service user's understanding of their experience in terms of problematic mood change and promote self-management of their condition. After completing the group sessions, service users are offered 6-8 individual sessions. These sessions are designed to consolidate and personalise information covered in the group sessions, and focus on mood management and relapse prevention by devising a staying well plan.

For someone to benefit from the programme they need to be ready to undertake the MoT course. Below are some suggestions to help you judge your service user's readiness for this intervention.

- The service user needs to understand clearly that the MoT course offers an **integrated approach** to the treatment and management of bipolar disorder. In BSMHFT we aim to offer NICE recommended interventions which include both medication and psychological intervention. It is not necessary to be taking medication to participate in the course, but the MoT course is not viewed as an alternative to medication. A pharmacy session is included as a part of the course.
- It is important that the service user is well enough to undertake the MoT course. Ideally, their mood should be stable and euthymic, or reasonably well recovered if having experienced a recent episode of mood instability. The course is an 11-week in person or 13-week online group, followed by with 6-8 weeks of individual sessions. Therefore, it is necessary for an individual to be able to concentrate sufficiently well enough to benefit from the teaching and engage in carrying out homework exercises.
- The service user will need to be looking to make changes to the way they manage their condition and willing to prioritise the time needed to attend the course on a regular weekly basis. Although 1 or 2 missed sessions can be catered for as in the case of sickness or holiday commitments, we would urge the service user to view their attendance as being as important as taking their medication regularly.
- It is a good idea to discuss with the service user the importance of reducing their commitment/demands on time whilst attending the course as we not only want to promote healthy manageable schedules for our service users to follow, but also want to minimise any problems that may occur with homework suggestions. We may suggest reviewing material or completing an activity by the next session, so it is important that the service user has some time to set aside to do this.

There may also be some practical considerations to consider for your service user:

- Do they have the ability to read and write? Do we need to assist with literacy to help them to engage with the course?
 - The course is currently being delivered online via zoom. Do they have access to a phone, laptop, or tablet in which to view the course?
 - If the course has moved back to face to face: Are they able to travel independently or will they require help with transport?
 - Are they English speaking or will they require help from an interpreter?
 - Are they comfortable in a group setting?
 - How will they manage childcare, work or caring responsibilities whilst attending?
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It is essential that referrers are aware that as a small team of clinical staff (currently 4), we are unable to offer individual psychological input other than that offered as part of the programme.

Additionally, **we are unable to provide a crisis service or individual sessions outside of group sessions and the 6-8 individual staying well sessions**, so it is important that those referred to our service remain under the care of their community mental health team (CMHT) for the duration of their time in the MoT programme. Their CMHT must be in Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust.

If you require any further information or would like help making your referral, please do not hesitate to contact the Bipolar Service using the contact information below.

The Bipolar Service

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