

# Pulling Together

Heightened national attention surrounding mental health may help break the stigma that still shrouds the path to wellness.

The drama of mental illness has recently been playing to large audiences from its popular venue on cinema and plasma screens, where the emotional pain within the storyline remains a comfortable, yet perceptible, distance from what we would like to think of as our personal realities. And yet, the stories seem to touch us, individually and communally.

The popular hit movie "Silver Linings Playbook" demonstrates our desire to understand the deep complexities of human behavior. In this award-winning portrayal, high school teacher Pat Solitano Jr. struggles to find his way to a balanced emotional life following an eight-month psychiatric hospitalization and the tragic end of his marriage to wife Nikki. Characteristics of bipolar disorder are honestly, poignantly

and humorously portrayed, as the audience travels the emotionally moving, yet capricious, journey toward psychological stability, along with Solitano and family—his parents, friends and potential love interest Tiffany, a fellow bipolar.

magic that lie in their empathetic and pliable relationships.

"Bipolar disorder is not a condition brought on by a weakness of will or a lack of prayer. It is a real illness and requires treatment," says Scott Haltzman, M.D., psychiatrist



A comprehensive list of mental health providers and support groups in the area can be found through the **National Association of Mental Illness of Collier County: 239-434-6726 or [namicollier.org](http://namicollier.org).**

As Solitano continues with treatment and positive changes occur, our compassion and acceptance of the entire Solitano family increases, as they begin to appear less diagnosable, more commonplace and whole, reuniting their family within the bonds of love and acceptance. This critically acclaimed movie is less an exposé of mental illness but more a study of family love and tolerance, highlighting the beauty and healing

with the David Lawrence Center. The Yale-trained Haltzman is the author of several books including "The Secrets of Happy Families: Eight Keys to Building a Lifetime of Connection and Contentment."

In it, Haltzman notes that although the "road from illness to wellness is not an easy transition, this condition is very treatable."

Sadly, not everyone suffering from a mental disorder will benefit from psychological intervention.



In fact, stigma surrounding mental disorders continues to potentially be one of the largest deterrents to treatment. "If we don't talk about these things, the stigma will continue," cautions Haltzman.

This May holds the distinction as the 64<sup>th</sup> annual Mental Health Awareness Month. It offers an "opportunity for citizens to work together to break through that stigma, express compassion for those who struggle with mental health issues and draw attention to the proven methods that can help change lives for the better,"

according to the Congressional Mental Health Caucus.

Our communal skin is highly sensitive to the potential trauma related to mental illness when left unchecked or untreated. Images of Sandy Hook, Aurora, Colo., and Virginia Tech—and far too many other examples of brutal human outbursts and destruction—remain imprinted in our hearts and minds. But mental illness does not have to lead to extreme aggression. "Most people with mental illness are not violent, although the rate of violence among people with mental illness is higher than the general population,"

explains Haltzman. "Psychological therapy (individual and family) is critical with this population and highly important in successful treatment." The assessment for assistive medications, as well as the use of supplements, exercise, healthy nutrition and meditation, can be useful tools in the treatment of bipolar disorder and other mental disorders.

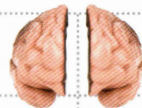
Did you know that one in four children and adults experiences mental health, emotional, psychological and/or substance abuse challenges? If someone you know is dealing with one of these issues, encourage them to seek the help they need through a local professional. Getting help is the first step toward wellness.

The David Lawrence Center is a nonprofit provider of behavioral health solutions dedicated to inspiring and creating life-changing wellness for every individual. For information: 239-455-8500 or [DavidLawrenceCenter.org](http://DavidLawrenceCenter.org) ☼

*Caryn Hacker-Buechel, A.C.S.W., D.C.S.W., is a David Lawrence Center board member who worked as a family psychotherapist for more than 25 years. She is the author of "A Bully Grows Up: Erick meets the Wizard."*

## Recognizing Bipolar Disorder's Common Characteristics

### Phase 1



### Phase 2

At least two weeks of depressive behavior:

Feelings of hopelessness

Persistent sadness

Lack of interest or pleasure in people and things

Difficulty sleeping or over-sleeping

Feelings of worthlessness

Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

At least a week of manic behavior:

Abnormally elevated mood and/or irritability

Over-inflated self-esteem

Increased talkativeness

Racing thoughts/distractibility

Decreased need for sleep

Increase in irresponsible behaviors—alcohol/drug use; unusual sexual behavior; shopping