

Guidelines, rules and things for you to know on joining this Telegram group

What we focus on

- Group discussion is for bipolar related matters, so try to stay mostly focused.
- Tone on instant messages is sometimes difficult to convey. Therefore, either use emoji's liberally, or be very clear in what you're saying.
- One advantage of the group is that we can talk freely about sensitive topics when we might not have anybody else to talk with. Unfortunately, some topics might be triggering for certain people, so if you're not feeling strong, or you have high levels of anxiety, then maybe avoid the group discussion that day.
- Discussion can be vigorous and fast flowing, so to avoid confusion by clicking/tapping on the particular message you are replying to.

What we avoid

- No discussion of sports, politics or religion. No sexual harassment or comments of a sexual nature. However feel free to discuss sex and sexuality as they relate to bipolar disorder (*e.g.* risky sexual behaviour during a manic episode) but do so in a sensitive manner.
- Be sensitive to issues related to race, gender, religion, income, *etc.* Never assume that someone has access to the same resources you do such as medical aid, access to psychiatrists, psychologists *etc.*
- No advertising or spamming!

Confidentiality

- Everything in the group **must be kept confidential**. Don't share people's numbers or names with outside parties without their explicit consent.

Other substances and self-harm

- Bipolar disorder is often experienced with other disorders, especially addiction. Don't encourage other people to consume addictive substances, and don't judge anyone struggling with an addiction who needs to talk about it. If you are struggling with

addiction yourself, tell your doctor, so that he or she can offer you effective treatment.

- Please don't mention specific methods of suicide or self-harm as these may be triggering to other people, or may give them ideas which otherwise they might not have had. If you must, rather talk about suicide or self-harm in general terms, but feel free to talk about your feelings to any extent.

Medication

- Feel free to talk about medications, but don't make changes to your medications based on discussion in the group – ask your doctor, and always do research about any possible changes.
- Never prescribe or swap medication with anybody!
- Look up the generic names for your meds. If someone mentions something that is of interest to you – you may be talking about the same medication. There is a table with medications commonly prescribed for Bipolar Disorder with their generic names available at <http://www.bipolar.capetown/uploads/R03.pdf>
- Please do not try to force someone to publically disclose what medication they are taking as this is a very personal matter.

Messaging one-on-one

- You may want to talk one-on-one with someone. If so, message them privately, and ask them if it is okay. Feel free to say “no” to anyone, if for any reason you don't wish to talk privately, and please don't feel offended if someone declines your request. Reasons may include not feeling safe; anxiety caused by intimacy issues; being emotionally exhausted *etc.*
- If you would like to meet up, do so in a safe environment. We don't know everyone who is added to the group personally – most of our members are probably great people, but one or two might not be very nice when unwell. Be safe.

Emergencies

- The group cannot help you in an acute psychiatric emergency. Asking others for emergency help may cause them extreme stress. Rather call the SADAG emergency number 0800 567 567 24hr Helpline 0800 12 13 14 or SMS 31393. They will call you or a friend/family member back if you prefer. There are additional contacts for emergency counselling at <http://www.bipolar.capetown/contact.html>

If you don't feel safe in the group

- If someone is doing something which is making you uncomfortable, message an admin (you can see on the group list who is an admin) to discuss the situation.

Following the guidelines, admins/moderators

- Our focus is on our meetings at Claro and Crescent Clinics and on creating a community around our gatherings. Communicating via Group Chat can be different from having a conversation in a room of people, so it is vital that we all respect the guidelines and rules set out for this group. The safety, harmony and best interest of the group are priorities; therefore disruptive, harmful or prejudicial behaviour, might result in someone being temporarily or permanently removed from the group by admins/moderators
- This group works really well as a support space but only if everyone feels comfortable and safe.

You might want to put the group on mute so that you don't get a notification sound every time someone sends a message 😊