

## Supporting Families Living with Maternal Bipolar Mood Disorder

Riley is thirteen years old and the oldest child of Mandy, a single mother who works part time as a hairdresser. Riley has no contact with his biological father and has intermittent contact with Sam; the father of Riley's younger siblings Alyssa (eight years old) and Jacob (three years old). Alyssa attends the local primary school that Riley also attended before he graduated to high school, and Jacob attends occasional family day care.

Mandy has been seeing the same family GP for several years. Amongst other things, the GP has been providing Mandy with support for her bipolar mood disorder, which was first diagnosed when Riley was two years old. She has also been referred to a psychiatrist in the past.

At a recent appointment with the GP, Mandy mentions her latest bout of insomnia which she thinks is due to worries about her children and financial stresses. 'I am really worried about Riley,' Mandy tells her GP. 'He started at the local high school a few weeks ago and since then he has increasingly insisted he is too unwell to attend. I've asked him what's wrong and he says he's too tired. Last week when I made him go, the school called me within a few hours to pick him up because he said he had a headache. When we got home, he told me he'd got into a fight with another kid at school and didn't ever want to go back.'

The GP asks Mandy how Alyssa and Jacob are going. Mandy says that Alyssa is going really well at school. 'She never seems to get in trouble; she is really helpful around the house and is a 'little mum' to her younger brother Jacob'.

Mandy becomes upset and shares with the GP that she is worried that bipolar mood disorder runs in her family, and that Riley is going to become unwell like her and her mother, who was also diagnosed with a mental illness.

Mandy says she wants Riley to talk with the GP and has booked an appointment for him.

### **Did you know...**

**MHPN has a series of webinars that cover a range of topical mental health issues.** Visit [www.mhpn.org.au](http://www.mhpn.org.au) to learn more.

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