

# Taking inventory from a to Z

**B**ipolar disorder affects so many areas of our lives. Sometimes, it's a good idea to take inventory of our attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors, and question where there's room for improvement. Doing so can provide helpful insight crucial to recovery and a better quality of life.

Following are a myriad of seemingly simple questions you might consider—everything from A to Z, literally! Patients, as well as family members and mental health professionals who support them, can use this “alphabetical” exercise to question how effectively they're dealing with bipolar disorder and with life in general.

Stephen Propst



Mind over mood

There are 130 questions, so you can take inventory and examine your strengths and weaknesses in a host of areas. Some questions will be easy to answer and create no real cause for concern. Others, however, might give you pause for reflection and uncover areas where you might make changes for the better. In such cases, explore further by asking:

- Whom do I need to talk to or reach out to for help?
- What additional resources, knowledge, or skills might I need to acquire?
- When am I going to start addressing the situation?
- How will making changes enhance my wellness and my overall well-being?

Since writing the article, I've found myself going back through the questions a number of times. It is indeed a worthwhile, constructive process. Now, it's time for you to take inventory—letter by letter!

Do you focus more on your **ability** or on your disability? Do you have a positive **attitude**? Have you **accepted** your situation? How do you handle the times when you feel **alone**? Do you see any **advantage** in having bipolar disorder?

What are you doing to control your **behavior**? Do you **blame** someone for your illness? Is your life in **balance**? What are you doing to fix your **brain**? Are you ever **bored**?

How **committed** are you to improving your health? Are you in **control** of your day-to-day affairs? Are you **compliant** in taking prescribed medication? Do your **circumstances** seem overwhelming? How hard are you working to make a **change** for the better?

Do you have a confirmed **diagnosis** that you're confident about? In what **direction** are you headed? Are you **determined** to stay on course? How much **doubt** do you struggle with? Have you **damaged** any relationships?

How high have you set your **expectations**? Are you **educating** yourself on your illness? What kind of **effort** are you making to achieve wellness? Have you made any changes in your **environment**? Are you keeping your **ego** in check?

Do you create a **façade** to hide behind? Are you looking for a quick **fix**? Is your outlook **fatalistic**? Are you filled with **fear**? Have you let your **family/friends** know what you need?

Are you **gung ho** about restoring meaning to your life? Have you set measurable **goals**? What are you **grateful** for? How **genuine** are your relationships? Are you more mindful of your **genius** or your illness?

Do you have **hope** for a brighter future? Do you take care of your **health**? Do you have a sense of **humor**? Have you developed good **habits**? Are you **humble** or full of pride?

Who and/or what **inspires** you? What's really **important** to you? What **ironies** do you see in your life? What **insight** have you gained lately? Do you still have areas of **immaturity** you want to work on?

Are you **jealous** of people who don't have a mental illness, or who have achieved more than you've been able to? Do you feel you are unfairly **judged**? Do you want a fulfilling **job**? Do you ever **jabber** too much? Have you ever **jeopardized** your character?

How much **knowledge** have you acquired about your illness? Has your life been **kaleidoscopic**—with ever-changing events and phases? What **keys** to successful recovery have you learned? What **know-how** (like coping skills) have you developed? How **keen** on recovery are you?

Are you ready to get your **life** back? Do people ever say that you're just being **lazy**? How **logical** was your last major decision? What **leaders** have positively influenced you? Have you ever told your story to a **legislator**?

How well are you **managing** your life? Have you learned from your **mistakes**? How **motivated** are you to help others? Have you considered therapy to work on how you see things in your **mind**? How positive is your **mind-set**?

Do you feel **normal**? Have you identified your real **needs**? Have you been **nice** to someone today? Have you **neglected** to do what's in your best interest? Do you ever feel like a **nobody**?

Are you **optimistic** about where you're headed? How **ordered** is your life? What **obstacles** do you currently face? What changes have you **observed** in your life lately? Are you prepared to take advantage of the next **opportunity** that comes your way?

How would you describe your **pain**? In what ways have you changed your **perspective**? When was the last time you **prayed**? Have you developed some

good **partnerships** with people who are helping you? Have you been **persistent** in following your treatment plan?

Do you need to spend more time being **quiet** and listening? What **qualities** do you possess that you are most proud of? What **qualifications** do you have for the job you say you really want? What famous **quote** best describes your life? What do you have **questions** about?

What are the most important **relationships** you have? Have you found it hard to face **reality**? Do you **respect** yourself? Do you think before you **react**? Do you ever **ramble** on and on?

Are you getting the **support** you need? What are you doing to alleviate **stress** in your life? Are there some things you shouldn't be **silent** about any more? What is your **strategy** for improving your life? Do you **stand up** for yourself?

What are your **triggers**? Do you generally **think** before you speak? What **talent** do you have that's been underutilized? Do you think **time** heals all wounds? Have you been **true** to yourself?

Are you **unique**? What have you done to help others **understand** what it's like to have bipolar disorder? Do you sometimes **undertake** too much? What are your **underlying** beliefs? Do you ever feel **unnerved**?

What's your **vision** for the future? Do you feel like a **victim**? What do you **value** in your life? Are you looking for **vengeance**? How do you define **victory**?

How careful are you with the **words** you use? Do you ever put your thoughts in **writing**? Do you ever feel **worthless**? Do you have a **winning** spirit? What is your life's **work**?

Do you have a proper **DX** (diagnosis)? What is your **TX** (treatment plan)? Are you regularly taking your **RX**? Have you ever seen a **Xerox** of your patient records? Do you know you can **X-ray** the brain and get an image of bipolar illness?

Are you taking care of **yourself**? Are you living in **yesterday**? What do you really **yearn** for? Do you sometimes feel like a

**yo-yo**? Have you considered **yoga**?

Do you feel like you're on a **zigzag** path? Have you **zeroed** in on your real problems? Do you think life's a **zoo**? Do you wish you could **zap** your illness and make it go away? Do you have a **zest** for life?

“Sometimes, it's a good idea to take inventory of our attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors, and question where there's room for improvement.”

Hopefully, this exercise made you stop and think a bit. You might use it as a catalyst for opening a dialogue with your family or friends. Or, perhaps you can share the thoughts that surfaced with your doctor or therapist and examine further particular areas of concern.

The magic is not in the questions, however. The magic happens when you take action in response to them. Only then do you begin to see positive changes happening in your life. Regardless of the steps you choose to take, it should be easier now that you've taken inventory—now that you know your ABCs. ●

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*Stephen Propst has bipolar disorder and uses many of the concepts he writes about to maintain his recovery. He serves as vice chair of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) board of directors; is a conference speaker and a coach/consultant about conditions such as bipolar disorder. He can be reached at [talktosteve@joimail.com](mailto:talktosteve@joimail.com)*