

# The feasibility of a newly developed blended psycho education course for adolescents with bipolar disorder and their parents; a pilot study

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## Introduction

In 2014 a blended psycho education (PE) course for adolescents with bipolar disorder and their parents was developed at the Dimence Centre for Bipolar Disorder in the Netherlands and carried out in 2015. The course consists of 5 group meetings with the adolescents and their parents and 7 online modules. The online modules contain facts about bipolar disorder, film fragments of professionals and peers and some home work assignments. During the face to face meetings, information was given, questions were answered and the participants were stimulated to share their experiences.

## Aims

This pilot study aims to gather information about the feasibility of the course and to gather information to further tailor the content of the course to the needs and expectations of the participants.

## Method

Two separate focus groups were organized to evaluate the PE course in a qualitative way, one with all 4 adolescents that participated and one with their parents, 3 couples and a single mother. An interview guide was used and content analysis of the transcripts was applied.

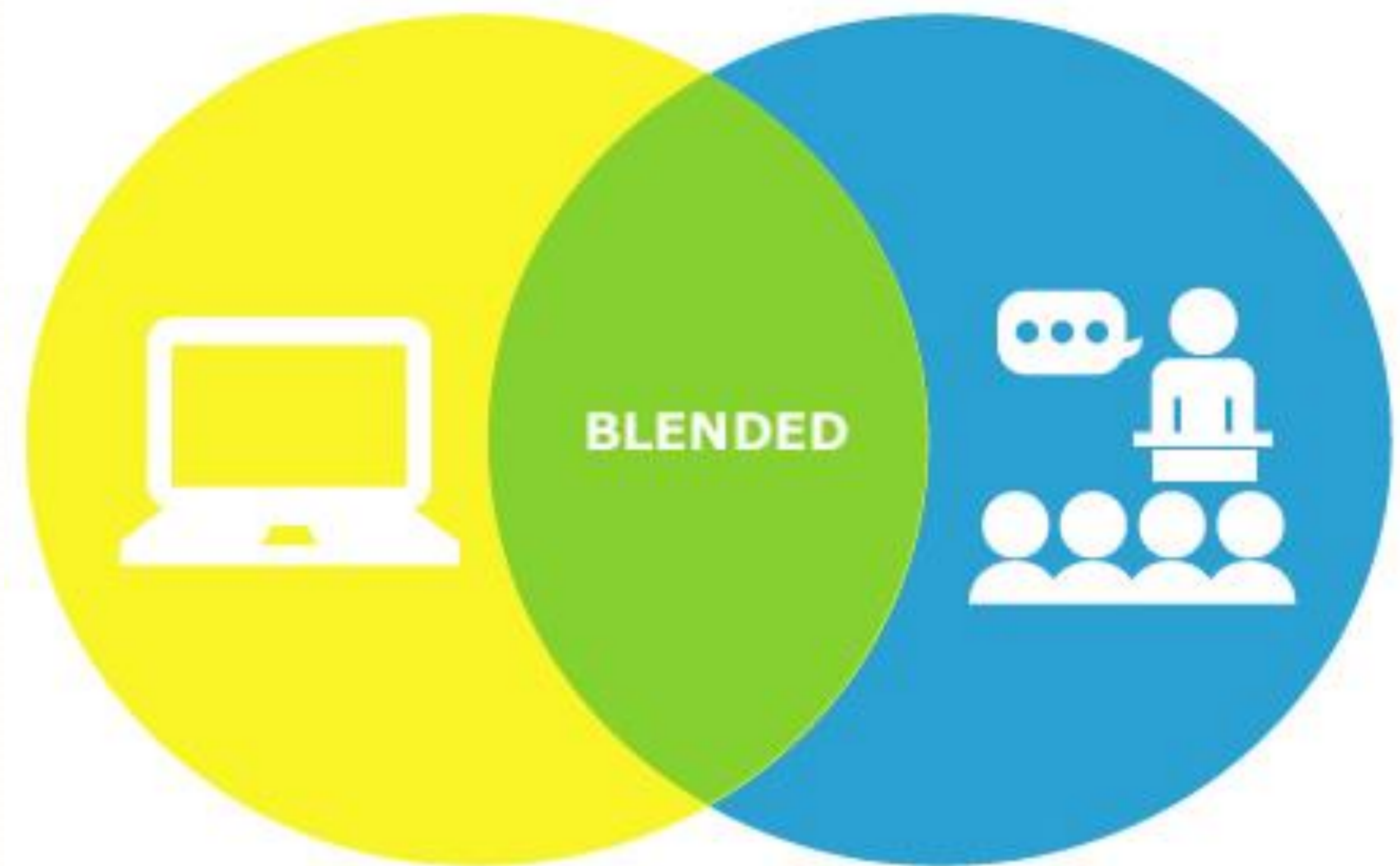
## Findings

### Perceived benefits:

- Both adolescents and parents stated that meeting peers was the most valuable benefit. Before the start of the course they knew nobody with this disease. Seeing others and sharing experiences and tips and tricks gave them hope for the future.
- Restoring contact between parent and child. Talking again about what happened to them restored contact and mutual respect.
- After the course adolescents took more responsibility for their self management activities such as daily mood charting and taking medication as prescribed. This gave parents hope and eased their burden.
- Adolescents mentioned that they were more aware of their condition and vulnerabilities and they took this into account while planning activities. This was also noticed by their parents.

### Needs improvement:

- Adolescents missed very specific information in the course how to handle things. Some had hoped for more straight forward solutions that they could apply easily.
- Some information on the slides that were used during the group meetings raised more questions than that it provided answers.



### Organization of the course:

- Parents missed clear and complete information about the course when they were invited to participate. They were not able to make an impression of what they could expect.
- Group size was experienced as good. More participants could have limited the time to share experiences.
- Both adolescents and parents stated that splitting up in two groups, one with adolescents and one with parents would have been a benefit for both. Talking about sex, drugs and alcohol was not something adolescents wanted to talk about in the group together with their parents. Some parents mentioned they were afraid to talk about certain topics during the course because they feared a conflict with their child if they should.
- Most participants spoke about the limited value of the online modules. When the diagnosis was set, most of them search the internet for information and the content of the online modules added little new information.
- Often, the online modules were offline and not approachable by the participants. Some gave up trying.

## Conclusions

The course is appreciated by both adolescents and parents. Meeting peers was the most valuable benefit for both. The findings of this pilot study gave valuable information to improve both content and organization of this blended PE course from the users perspective.

### What did we do next:

- Information leaflets that were handed out before the start of the next course were evaluated and improved.
- During the next course, a separate meeting was held for adolescents only and for parents only.
- The information on the slides was evaluated and updated.

## Contact information

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