

Q & A Mindline



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Q My 43 year old brother speaks very negatively all the time, he keeps repeating that life is worthless and the time to leave this world is coming soon. He is quieter otherwise and mingles less with family and his old friends. He suffered loss in his business about five years ago and had a heart attack soon after that. Now he drinks excessively and refuses to accept the reality; this is becoming a problem. Please help.

First thing that comes to my mind is that your brother is either just going through a depressive phase of life exacerbated by wrong choice of coping (alcohol excesses), or he is suffering from major depression, which is a clinical illness. In case of the former, he may be amenable to support, assurance and encouragement to understand and work through the problem, and importantly be willing to prevent it from worsening due to maladaptive coping style with destructive manner of drinking. The latter is a common mental health problem, amenable to treatment and

intervention. It can be effectively treated with a combination of psychotherapy (talking therapy) and medications such as antidepressants, which contrary to misconceptions, are neither addictive nor are required to be taken for life in majority of the cases.

Depression worsens with excess alcohol. When taken in moderation, alcohol may elevate mood but beyond a couple of drinks it dips the mental state. It contributes to negativity, which can escalate to suicidal ideas and even planning. Worse, it disinhibits individuals, making them act on such ideas by being impulsive, sometimes to the point of no return by a successful suicide attempt.

My advice is that you have him seen by a psychiatrist for formal evaluation of mental health, drinking patterns and suicidal risk. His problems are very much treatable. Therefore, waste no time in delaying the needed intervention.

Life is much bigger than the problems we encounter. But unfortunately for some, during sensitive and difficult times, it may not seem so. As a family, give him all the support you can and importantly lend him that 'ear' that he may be yearning for.

Q My 20 year old son took an overdose of sleeping tablets following a breakup with his girlfriend. He had been irritable for a few days and slept very late. He was hospitalised for treatment and has recovered well. He was not seen by a psychiatrist during this admission, and I am not sure why. What do you suggest?

Young individuals get very attached to each other and upon separation can experience a strong 'sense of rejection'. This is followed by low mood and negativity, sometimes engaging in self-harm or suicidal act (impulsively or after contemplation and planning). It's the latter one we worry about clinically, as the risk of repetition is higher.

Suicidal behaviour is usually associated with mental health and psychological problems. Studies have noted that prevalence of mental health problems is higher in the young (10-24 years) with one in every two individuals suffering from mental illness (depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and alcohol use).

Compared to general population, the risk of successful suicide after the initial self-harm episode is highest within the first six months, and there is over 20-fold increased risk in further five years. It is therefore important that all individuals who engage in self-harm or a suicidal act must be referred to a psychiatrist for suicidal risk assessment and counselling. Assessment of these individuals will include attention to specific stressors, alcohol/drug problems, social circumstances, and most importantly the exploration of underlying mental health difficulties.

You should talk to him openly as a friend and offer unconditional support. I suggest he consults a psychiatrist for a formal evaluation of any ongoing mental health issues and suicidal thoughts. Perhaps he just needs supportive counselling to help him adjust with his relationship issues.

Ask your queries at
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