

# Q & A Mindline



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**Q Following the break up with his girlfriend, my teenage son took an overdose of sleeping tablets. He was hospitalised for treatment and has recovered well. However, he was quiet and even isolated himself for few days and would get irritable over trivial matters. He did not see a psychiatrist during this admission in the hospital and I am not sure why. Please advise.**

Heartbreak at any age (perhaps more so at a young age) can be difficult, especially in a romantic relationship. The sense of rejection and abandonment can be overwhelming for some. Like any other loss event, your son may also be going through a grief reaction, wherein he may be experiencing low moods which seems to manifest with irritability and social withdrawal. In most cases, a person works through the stage of grief and change, naturally, but sometimes require TLC (tender loving care) and support.

If the self-esteem and confidence level is limited, then one may experience profound negativity about the future and this can fuel self-harm or suicidal thoughts, planning or actual

engagement in the act, at times as an impulse, but others following contemplation and planning. It's the latter one that we worry about clinically, as the risk of repetition is higher.

Compared to the general population, the risk of completed suicide after the initial self-harm episode is highest within the first six months and there is over 20-fold increase in further five years. Therefore, all individuals who engage in self-harm or a suicidal act, are seen by a psychiatrist for suicidal risk assessment and counselling. Assessment will include attention to specific stressors, alcohol/drugs problems, social circumstances and importantly, an exploration of underlying mental health difficulties.

I think you should talk to him openly in a non-judgmental manner and offer unconditional support. Keep an eye on his thought processes and note the move from pessimism to acceptance and positivity. Nevertheless, I suggest he sees a trained mental health professional or a psychiatrist for a formal evaluation of any ongoing psychological issues and suicidal risk assessment. Equally, such a professional will be well placed to offer supportive counselling to help overcome the grief.

**Q Our family is always on the phone, computer or tablet devices. We hardly talk to each other even when we are together. At times, we send each other messages, as that seems to be a more efficient way of communicating, even when everyone is available in the house. It appears to be taking a toll on the quality of our relationships. My children have become stubborn and lazy and my husband and I don't sleep well. Please help.**

Yours is one of the many families who seem to have abandoned the real world

for a virtual life and persona. They are accessing a full range of unnecessary information and are connected to all the people around the world, except to those around them! This virtual bubble has given us an illusion of connection, but seems to have disconnected us more than we imagined.

Perhaps social media is consuming much of our waking moments and is contributing to an ever increasing isolated existence, poorer development of social and interpersonal skills and coping resources. The results are, compromised quality of real relationships, psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, and maladaptive use of drug and alcohol. Not to forget, the sleep deprivation and disturbances that you and your husband are already experiencing. Overall, the benefits of social media may be matching its disadvantages.

Here is some advice for us all: use your smartphone and computer for a specific purpose only and track the time spent online. Choose the use of social media on either phone or computer, not on both. Cut down membership of the number of social networking sites and substitute newly available time with sports and health/fitness activity.

Choose real person interaction, over virtual connect and where possible, make a phone call for communication or conveying wishes etc. Consider technology-free dinners and restrict use of electronic devices while together. And as you put the electronic devices down, choose a nature walk, exercises or yoga for the quality of sleep to improve.

If the compulsive digital behaviour continues, then it may be worth seeing an addiction specialist for evaluation of developing or established emotional or psychological issues. I think we all need to reclaim our lives and relationships back and reconnect with our surrounding, for a mindful rather than a mindless existence.