

Q & A Mindline



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Q A few years ago, my son (21) was counselled when he had an anxiety attack and academic stress. He responded well at that time, but continues to experience anxiety quite often. He now suffers from poor sleep, goes to bed at 3 a.m. and wakes after 11 a.m. He also spends excessive time watching television and on his phone. Please advise.

I think your son's issues pertain to the new-age lifestyle disease called digital obsession or addiction and its consequences, which is a delay in attending to things that are necessary, thereby resulting in stress and anxiety.

People are spending an enormous amount of time staring at the bright screens of their digital devices, in search of the world far away and a virtual life at the cost of real existence. This time away from reality, is an add-on to the pre-existing TV (the idiot box) time, which was already consuming much of our waking time.

Using the internet, social media and electronic communication devices are amongst the most common activities of today's world. We are connected more than ever and have access to any information that we may desire, just through a simple 'swipe and type' or verbal command. Despite

this, we are lonelier and overloaded with unnecessary information and disconnected from those with and right next to us!

The downside of this new way of life (digital life) is erratic time management and the blurring of prioritization skills. The good news is that when we have an insight of the possible causes, we are better equipped to take remedial action. So here are some tips to get started:

- Unplug, put down the digital device and reconnect with people, things and real-world activities
- Encourage your son to enroll for a fitness programme, as it will boost concentration, energy, and enthusiasm
- He must consider 'smart work' and plan his study to gain a deeper understanding of the subject and not just for getting through the exams

Finally, I suggest regular therapy sessions with a psychiatrist or psychologist for ongoing support and guidance on changes in lifestyle and development of insight into your son's recurring anxiety, as well as a timely address of concerns, questions, and feelings surrounding situations which need scrutiny.

Q I have plenty of dreams throughout the night and this disturbs my sleep. I wake up dull and tired. Please help.

Dreams are a complex phenomenon and assumed to have a crucial psychological role. To Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, dreams provided a hint or access to the person's deepest unconscious longings. Newer theories suggest that they help the brain to consolidate emotional memories or to work through current problems.

Perhaps, these are a day's mental residue, which the brain sweeps up every night as a person enters a deeply relaxed state, when defenses are down, allowing the flow of content in visual form. Some data suggests



a physiological basis and that REM (rapid eye movement) sleep when most dreams occur, is the brain's way of warming up its circuits and tuning the mind for conscious awareness.

Clinically interpretation of dream requires a detailed understanding of the individual in question and his unattended feelings (both conscious and unconscious). For this, regular therapy sessions are recommended, to gain insight into your emotional life and to access the deepest recesses of your mind.

In the meantime, consider meditation and becoming meditative, as a way of containing erratic thoughts and leaving little (unpleasant) residue for visualizing during sleep. Caring and compassion during waking hours can positively script your dreams. De-stress and relax when possible and begin to unwind an hour or more before sleep. Also, ensure your sleep time is undisturbed, if possible.

Furthermore, make sure your sleeping space is 'digital free,' ambient and tranquil, combined with relaxing music and prioritized for relaxation. Avoid stimulating caffeinated drinks, nicotine or alcohol and eat light veggies (where possible) two hours before sleep time. Establishing a morning exercise routine also contributes to sound sleep and refreshed waking.