

Collaborative Care, Anxiety and Worry in Adolescence

Susan is a fifteen year old girl who attends her local state secondary school. She is the middle child with an older brother, Max (17) and a younger sister, Zoe (13). Max is the sports captain of the school and is popular with his peers, whilst Zoe is still settling into the school, having started year 7 this year. It sometimes seems as if Susan might be overshadowed by her brother's success at school.

Susan's parents recently separated and she lives with her mother (Vicky) and siblings, with regular visits from her Dad (Michael). It has been difficult to know what the separation has meant for Susan as she had been close to her father.

The school's Assistant Principal (AP) called Vicky a couple of weeks ago, concerned about Susan's academic performance and school attendance. Susan's academic performance has dropped recently, but prior to this she was achieving very high marks and had been selected to be part of the school's accelerated learning program. The AP knows that Susan is smart and understands concepts better than most in her class, but is worried she may start to fall behind if she continues to miss classes. The AP notes that Susan has always been reluctant to 'speak-up' in class, but responds to any of her teachers' questions. A suggestion is made for Susan to visit the school counsellor to talk through anything that may be bothering her. Vicky explains to the AP that she has tried to talk to Susan, but she often responds quite angrily and says she wishes her mum would "just stop nagging". Vicky admits that she feels like 'she is walking on egg shells' most of the time. Vicky goes on to say that "Susan was always such a diligent student and worried constantly about her academic performance." On a number of occasions she has studied well into the night which Vicky has found quite concerning.

Susan spends a lot of time on Instagram and Facebook, constantly checking these on either her mobile phone or PC. She takes her mobile everywhere. The minute she hears it signal the arrival of a message, she almost jumps to check it. Netball has always provided a healthy distraction and was something she really loved, but recently she seems overly concerned about how 'fat' her legs look in her netball skirt rather than her performance on the court. She will often leave training early, racing out the door of the stadium, with the excuse of an important homework assignment or a 'big' test the next day, only to arrive home and check for messages on her PC. She has told her mum that she is not going to play next season and "doesn't know why she ever started playing the stupid game in the first place". Susan seems embarrassed by her involvement in the sport and hates anyone congratulating her on her performance after the game.

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CASE STUDY

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Vicky has noticed that Susan's eating habits have also changed recently, and that she is snacking more than usual, typically eating chocolate biscuits, two-minute noodles, or chocolate chip muesli bars, but she will often skip breakfast and rarely finishes her plate at dinner. Nevertheless, she has gained a couple of kilos in the last few months. Susan's skin has also started to deteriorate, and whilst Vicky had initially thought that this was 'just a normal part of growing up' she has bought her a range of products to treat acne after Susan added them in capital letters to the shopping list. Even so, Susan only uses them occasionally. There is a school formal at the end of term that Susan may attend. She had a boyfriend last year but he broke off the relationship and now goes out with a previous friend of Susan's.

After the call from the school's AP, Vicky insists that Susan visit their family GP. Vicky feels that the GP knows the family and doesn't trust Susan to visit the school counsellor. Susan reluctantly goes and when pressed by the GP confides that she is worried about her future and afraid that she will never "amount to anything" and is worried about what her friends think of her. She admits to being really embarrassed by her "zit problem" and feels like she is "becoming a man" because of the facial hair that has started to develop and her more noticeable BO.

Following this admission she becomes teary, glances at her mobile phone and slumps lower in her chair.

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