

CASE STUDY

Suicide ideation in primary school-aged children

Joshua's story

When Joshua was five, his father died in a car accident, leaving him, his mother Emily and his sister Madison (aged three) struggling both emotionally and financially.

Following the death, Joshua became quite withdrawn and was reluctant to spend time with friends or family.

About a year later, Emily started a relationship with Travis. In his father's absence, Joshua had always tried to be the man of the house, shouldering a lot of worry on behalf of his mother who had started drinking at night when she was most upset and struggling to cope. Without her husband's income, the family became reliant on Centrelink benefits, which stressed Emily even more. Travis would often pay for groceries which helped improve things slightly. Travis moved into the family home when Emily fell pregnant. This alleviated some more of the financial pressures, but Joshua struggled with a new leader of the house and he often felt quite left out and unimportant as Emily had a strong focus on Travis and their new baby, Alex.

At the age of seven Joshua was diagnosed with major depressive disorder by the family GP. His GP developed a mental health plan providing Joshua with access to a psychologist. At the end of the third session he told his mum he didn't want to go anymore so she agreed to let him stop the sessions.

When Joshua is nine, Emily and Travis have a second child, Grace. Following Grace's birth, Joshua feels even more left out than ever.

Deciding they needed more space, about a year ago, Emily and Travis moved to a larger house in another suburb. This meant that Joshua and Madison had to move schools. Joshua used to see his father's parents every weekend before they moved. He is missing interaction with his grandparents as they used to take him to the movies, play cards and board games with him, and just generally be there when he wanted to chat. As they aren't good with technology, don't use Facebook and can't afford to call Emily's mobile to chat to Joshua, his connection is now limited to school holiday visits.

Joshua has been at this new school for 10 months, but in the last six his teacher has raised concerns with Emily that he is not concentrating at school and lagging behind in tasks. The teacher has also noticed that he is finding it hard to make friends. At home Emily has noticed that Joshua wants to spend more and more time on his own in his bedroom playing video games, rather than playing outside with his sister Madison. They used to always play basketball, bounce on the trampoline or ride their bikes together.

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Joshua is feeling very left out in the family and struggling to enjoy school. When Emily asks him how he is feeling he just says, “I’m fine, just leave me alone”. Emily senses something more is going on for Joshua, but just can’t seem to get him to talk to her. She has asked Travis to try but Travis says he’s not his father and not his responsibility.

Emily decides to take Joshua to the doctor to see if he could find out what is going on. After some initial enquiries, Joshua tells the doctor that he was thinking of killing himself because no one cares about him.