

Case Study 2

Communicating with a patient with anorexia who is self-harming

Description of the case study

Martina is 10-year-old girl who goes to her parents since she is very concerned about her sister, Sandra, who is four years older, 13 years old. Martina is concerned because she has seen superficial cuts on the forearm and hips of Sandra. Sandra says nothing about it to her younger sister but even so Martina decides to speak with her parents, who are both healthcare professionals and very busy because this is in the middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

When the parents speak with Sandra they realise that she has tried to commit suicide, or at least make 'a call for help'.

They know that since the pandemic started she has been very isolated in her room, mostly alone since the sisters do not share a room but have separate rooms. She has no mobile phone but does use a tablet on a regular basis, around 6 hours a day. The parents are normally too busy to check what she is doing or watching on the tablet. Sandra feels 'fat', and for this reason she is eating a lot less.

The parents take her to see her (GP) General Practitioner, and during the consultation with Sandra she does not speak very much, and seems crestfallen, and down. She mentions a 'virtual boyfriend' who, in her own words, 'challenged her to cut herself'. But when the GP asks her whether she has feelings of wanting to end it all (i.e. commit suicide), she denies this.

The General Practitioner refers Sandra to the Teaching Hospital to see a ED specialist.

Questions

1. If you were the General Practitioner what kind of language would you use with Sandra? And what would you write on the referral note to the ED specialist?
2. In this case, what would you do if you were the ED specialist? Would you recommend some kind of Art Therapy (e.g. Visual arts therapy)? Why? Why not?
3. Would you include the family in the Art Therapy, and, if so, how?

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