

## 13 Reasons Why: Information Sheet and Resource Guide

**What is 13 Reasons Why?** *13 Reasons Why* is a Netflix TV series about a fictional 17-year old named Hannah Baker, a troubled and bullied high school student, who takes her own life. Throughout the show, there are a series of audiotapes that describe the 13 reasons why Hannah took her own life. Each show is graphic, with scenes of sexual assault, underage drinking, bullying, and suicide.

**Why are there concerns about 13 Reasons Why?** This show portrays suicide as a reasonable option and seems to blame others for her suicide, instead of emphasizing there are many positive mechanisms and options for support and treatment for her. There are little to no signs Hannah is depressed and contemplating suicide until late in the series, and usually, there are signs of suicide along the way. Additionally, there are no positive connections between youth and adults in the show: the 13<sup>th</sup> reason why Hannah kills herself is because the guidance counselor is not helpful. We want youth to know that adults and mental health professionals are available to help. Another concern is the graphic depiction of her death. Finally, this show is easily accessible, and youth are binge watching the series in a matter of days—without debriefing with adults.

### What can we do about 13 Reasons Why?

- **Guidance for Families (Adapted from NASP):**
  - Talk to your child about whether they have seen 13 Reasons Why, and if they insist on watching the show, watch the series with them. Have conversations with your children about their thoughts and comments, and listen without judgement and remain calm.
  - If you are concerned that your child is contemplating suicide, ask your child if they have thought about suicide. Talking about suicide with your child **does not** increase their risk.
  - Talk to community or school mental health professionals if you are concerned about your child's health or safety.
- **Guidance for Educators (Adapted from NASP):**
  - Talk to teachers, parents, and youth about the risk factors of suicide, and take the warning signs of suicide seriously. Explain to youth that school-employed mental health professionals and other adults are there to help them. Additionally, do not promise to keep suicide a secret.
  - Youth who watch 13 Reasons Why should watch the series with a supportive adult.
  - Suicidal youth will probably not seek help directly; school personnel can recognize the signs. Specific actions include: a) listen to students, remain calm, and be nonjudgmental, b) do not leave the student alone, c) ask the student directly if they're thinking about suicide, d) avoid statements like "you should get over it," e) get professional help, f) remove firearms or means for self-harm.
  - Reinforce resilience factors: family and peer support, school and community connectedness, adaptive coping skills, religious beliefs that discourage suicide.
  - Ensure that all students on campus are monitored and the school environment is safe.

**How can I find more resources about 13 Reasons Why?** Resources from the National Association for School Psychologists (NASP), Jed Foundation, and National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) are attached. Additional resources include: Save Foundation: (<https://www.save.org/about-suicide/preventing-suicide/reporting-on-suicide/>), Kognito webinar: (<http://go.kognito.com/13ReasonsWhyWebinar.html>), and a parent's perspective: (<http://nickwattssoulfood.com/2017/04/23/netflixs-13-reasons-why-is-not-merely-dark-its-dangerous/>).

## **13 Reasons Why Netflix Series: Considerations for Educators**

Schools have an important role in preventing youth suicide, and being aware of potential risk factors in students' lives is vital to this responsibility. The trending Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, based on a young adult novel of the same name, is raising such concerns. The series revolves around 17-year-old Hannah Baker, who takes her own life and leaves behind audio recordings for 13 people who she says in some way were part of why she killed herself. Each tape recounts painful events in which one or more of the 13 individuals played a role.

Producers for the show say they hope the series can help those who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. However, the series, which many teenagers are binge watching without adult guidance and support, is raising concerns from suicide prevention experts about the potential risks posed by the sensationalized treatment of youth suicide. The series graphically depicts a suicide death and addresses in wrenching detail a number of difficult topics, such as bullying, rape, drunk driving, and slut shaming. The series also highlights the consequences of teenagers witnessing assaults and bullying (i.e., bystanders) and not taking action to address the situation (e.g., not speaking out against the incident, not telling an adult about the incident).

### **CAUTIONS**

We do not recommend that vulnerable youth, especially those who have any degree of suicidal ideation, watch this series. Its powerful storytelling may lead impressionable viewers to romanticize the choices made by the characters and/or develop revenge fantasies. They may easily identify with the experiences portrayed and recognize both the intentional and unintentional effects on the central character. Unfortunately, adult characters in the show, including the second school counselor who inadequately addresses Hannah's pleas for help, do not inspire a sense of trust or ability to help. Hannah's parents are also unaware of the events that lead to her suicide death.

While many youth are resilient and capable of differentiating between a TV drama and real life, engaging in thoughtful conversations with them about the show is vital. Doing so presents an opportunity to help them process the issues addressed, consider the consequences of certain choices, and reinforce the message that **suicide is not a solution to problems** and that help is available. **This is particularly important for adolescents who are isolated, struggling, or vulnerable to suggestive images and storylines.** Research shows that exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of death, can be one of the many risk factors that youth struggling with mental health conditions cite as a reason they contemplate or attempt suicide.

What the series does accurately convey is that there is no single cause of suicide. Indeed, there are likely as many different pathways to suicide as there are suicide deaths. However, the series does not emphasize that common among most suicide deaths is the presence of treatable mental illnesses. Suicide is **not** the simple consequence of stressors or coping challenges, but rather, it is most typically a combined result of treatable mental illnesses and overwhelming or intolerable stressors.

School psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals can assist stakeholders (e.g., school administrators, parents, and teachers) to engage in supportive conversations with students as well as provide resources and offer expertise in preventing harmful behaviors.

## GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATORS

1. While we do not recommend that all students view this series, it can be appreciated as an opportunity to better understand young people's experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Children and youth who view this series will need supportive adults to process it. Take this opportunity to both prevent the risk of harm and identify ongoing social and behavior problems in the school community that may need to be addressed.
2. Help students articulate their perceptions when viewing controversial content, such as *13 Reasons Why*. The difficult issues portrayed do occur in schools and communities, and it is important for adults to listen, take adolescents' concerns seriously, and be willing to offer to help.
3. Reinforce that school-employed mental health professionals are available to help. Emphasize that the behavior of the second counselor in the series is understood by virtually all school-employed mental health professionals as inappropriate. It is important that all school-employed mental health professionals receive training in suicide risk assessment.
4. Make sure parents, teachers, and students are aware of suicide risk warning signs. **Always take warning signs seriously, and never promise to keep them secret. Establish a confidential reporting mechanism for students.** Common signs include:
  - Suicide threats, both direct ("I am going to kill myself." "I need life to stop.") and indirect ("I need it to stop." "I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up."). Threats can be verbal or written, and they are often found in online postings.
  - Giving away prized possessions.
  - Preoccupation with death in conversation, writing, drawing, and social media.
  - Changes in behavior, appearance/hygiene, thoughts, and/or feelings. This can include someone who is typically sad who suddenly becomes extremely happy.
  - Emotional distress.
5. Students who feel suicidal are not likely to seek help directly; however, parents, school personnel, and peers can recognize the warning signs and take immediate action to keep the youth safe. When a student gives signs that they may be considering suicide, take the following actions:
  - Remain calm, be nonjudgmental, and listen. Strive to understand the intolerable emotional pain that has resulted in suicidal thoughts.
  - Avoid statements that might be perceived as minimizing the student's emotional pain (e.g., "You need to move on." or "You should get over it.").
  - Ask the student **directly** if they are thinking about suicide (i.e., "Are you thinking of suicide?").
  - Focus on your concern for their well-being and avoid being accusatory.
  - Reassure the student that there is help and they will not feel like this forever.
  - Provide constant supervision. **Do not leave the student alone.**
  - Without putting yourself in danger, remove means for self-harm, including any weapons the person might find.
  - **Get help.** Never agree to keep a student's suicidal thoughts a secret. Instead, school staff should take the student to a school-employed mental health professional. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources. Students should tell an appropriate caregiving adult, such as a school psychologist, administrator, parent, or teacher.
6. School or district officials should determine how to handle memorials after a student has died. Promote memorials that benefit others (e.g., donations for a suicide prevention program) and activities that foster a sense of hope and encourage positive action. The memorial should not glorify, highlight, or accentuate the individual's death. It may lead to imitative behaviors or a suicide contagion (Brock et al., 2016).
7. Reinforcing resiliency factors can lessen the potential of risk factors that lead to suicidal ideation and behaviors. Once a child or adolescent is considered at risk, schools, families, and friends should work to build these factors in and around the youth.
  - Family support and cohesion, including good communication.
  - Peer support and close social networks.
  - School and community connectedness.

- Cultural or religious beliefs that discourage suicide and promote healthy living.
  - Adaptive coping and problem-solving skills, including conflict resolution.
  - General life satisfaction, good self-esteem, and a sense of purpose.
  - Easy access to effective medical and mental health resources.
8. Strive to ensure that **all** student spaces on campus are monitored and that the school environment is truly safe, supportive, and free of bullying.
  9. If additional guidance is needed, ask for support from your building- or district-level crisis team. The team may be able to assist with addressing unique situations affecting your building.

See [Preventing Suicide: Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams](#) for additional guidance.

**Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) and the JED Foundation have created talking points for conversations with youth specific to the *13 Reasons Why* series, [available online](#).**

## GUIDANCE FOR FAMILIES

1. Ask your child if they have heard or seen the series *13 Reasons Why*. While we don't recommend that they be encouraged to view the series, do tell them you want to watch it, with them or to catch up, and discuss their thoughts.
2. If they exhibit any of the warning signs above, don't be afraid to ask if they have thought about suicide or if someone is hurting them. Raising the issue of suicide does not increase the risk or plant the idea. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity to offer help.
3. Ask your child if they think any of their friends or classmates exhibit warning signs. Talk with them about how to seek help for their friend or classmate. Guide them on how to respond when they see or hear any of the warning signs.
4. Listen to your children's comments without judgment. Doing so requires that you fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said. Put your own agenda aside.
5. Get help from a school-employed or community-based mental health professional if you are concerned for your child's safety or the safety of one of their peers.

See [Preventing Youth Suicide Brief Facts](#) (also available in [Spanish](#)) and [Preventing Youth Suicide: Tips or Parents and Educators](#) for additional information.

## SAFE MESSAGING FOR STUDENTS

1. **Suicide is never a solution. It is an irreversible choice regarding a temporary problem. There is help. If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide or know someone who is, talk to a trusted adult, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text "START" to 741741.**
2. Don't be afraid to talk to your friends about how they feel and let them know you care about them.
3. Be an "upstander" and take actions to reduce bullying and increase positive connections among others. Report concerns.
4. Never promise to keep secret behaviors that represent a danger toward another person.
5. **Suicide is preventable.** People considering suicide typically say something or do something that is a warning sign. Always take warning signs seriously and know the warning signs.
  - Suicide threats, both direct ("I am going to kill myself.") and indirect ("I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up."). Can be verbal, written, or posted online.
  - Suicide notes and planning, including online postings.
  - Preoccupation with death in conversation, writing, drawing, and social media.
  - Changes in behavior, appearance/hygiene, thoughts, and/or feelings.
  - Emotional distress.

6. Separate myths and facts.
  - **MYTH:** Talking about suicide will make someone choose death by suicide who has never thought about it before. **FACT:** There is no evidence to suggest that talking about suicide plants the idea. Talking with your friend about how they feel and letting them know that you care about them is important. This is the first step in getting your friend help.
  - **MYTH:** People who struggle with depression or other mental illness are just weak. **FACT:** Depression and other mental illnesses are serious health conditions and are treatable.
  - **MYTH:** People who talk about suicide won't really do it. **FACT:** People, particularly young people who are thinking about suicide, typically demonstrate warning signs. Always take these warning signs seriously.
7. **Never leave the person alone; seek out a trusted adult immediately.** School-employed mental health professionals like your school psychologist are trusted sources of help.
8. Work with other students and the adults in the school if you want to develop a memorial for someone who has died by suicide. Although decorating a student's locker, creating a memorial social media page, or other similar activities are quick ways to remember the student who has died, they may influence others to imitate or have thoughts of wanting to die as well. It is recommended that schools develop memorial activities that encourage hope and promote positive outcomes for others (e.g., suicide prevention programs).

Read these [helpful points](#) from SAVE.org and the JED Foundation to further understand how *13 Reasons Why* dramatizes situations and the realities of suicide. See [Save a Friend: Tips for Teens to Prevent Suicide](#) for additional information.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text "START" to 741741
- [Center for Disease Control Suicide Datasheet](#)
- [SAMHSA Prevention Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center, After a Suicide: Toolkit for Schools](#)
- [Memorials: Special Considerations for Memorializing an Incident](#)

## WEBSITES

- National Association of School Psychologists, [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)
- American Association of Suicidology, [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, [www.save.org](http://www.save.org)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, <https://afsp.org/>
- [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)
- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

## REFERENCES

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# 13 REASONS WHY TALKING POINTS

- 13 Reasons Why is a fictional story based on a widely known novel and is meant to be a cautionary tale.
- You may have similar experiences and thoughts as some of the characters in 13RW. People often identify with characters they see on TV or in movies. However, it is important to remember that there are healthy ways to cope with the topics covered in 13RW and acting on suicidal thoughts is not one of them.
- If you have watched the show and feel like you need support or someone to talk to reach out. Talk with a friend, family member, a counselor, or therapist. There is always someone who will listen.
- Suicide is not a common response to life's challenges or adversity. The vast majority of people who experience bullying, the death of a friend, or any other adversity described in 13RW do not die by suicide. In fact, most reach out, talk to others and seek help or find other productive ways of coping. They go on to lead healthy, normal lives.
- Suicide is never a heroic or romantic act. Hannah's suicide (although fictional) is a cautionary tale, not meant to appear heroic and should be viewed as a tragedy.
- It is important to know that, in spite of the portrayal of a serious treatment failure in 13RW, there are many treatment options for life challenges, distress and mental illness. Treatment works.
- Suicide affects everyone and everyone can do something to help if they see or hear warning signs that someone is at risk of suicide.
- Talking openly and honestly about emotional distress and suicide is ok. It will not make someone more suicidal or put the idea of suicide in their mind. If you are concerned about someone, ask them about it.
- Knowing how to acknowledge and respond to someone who shares their thoughts of emotional distress or suicide with you is important. Don't judge them or their thoughts. Listen. Be caring and kind. Offer to stay with them. Offer to go with them to get help or to contact a crisis line.
- How the guidance counselor in 13RW responds to Hannah's thoughts of suicide is not appropriate and not typical of most counselors. School counselors are professionals and a trustworthy source for help. If your experience with a school counselor is unhelpful, seek other sources of support such as a crisis line.
- While not everyone will know what to say or have a helpful reaction, there are people who do, so keep trying to find someone who will help you. If someone tells you they are suicidal, take them seriously and get help.
- When you die you do not get to make a movie or talk to people any more. Leaving messages from beyond the grave is a dramatization produced in Hollywood and is not possible in real life.
- Memorializing someone who died by suicide is not a recommended practice. Decorating someone's locker who died by suicide and/or taking selfies in front of such a memorial is not appropriate and does not honor the life of the person who died by suicide.
- Hannah's tapes blame others for her suicide. Suicide is never the fault of survivors of suicide loss. There are resources and support groups for suicide loss survivors.

## If you're struggling with thoughts of suicide...

- Text "START" to 741741
- Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Talking points by:





## ***13 Reasons Why***

Lately, there has been a lot of talk about the Netflix series, *13 Reasons Why*, based on the novel of the same name by Jay Asher. The Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) and the Jed Foundation have developed talking points to help parents, teachers, and other gatekeepers talk with youth about suicide as it relates to the situational drama that unfolds in the series. We here at NAMI Maryland are passing them along to help you make informed choices about watching the show and how to address it with the young people in your lives.

- *13 Reasons Why* is a fictional story based on a widely known novel and is meant to be a cautionary tale.
- You may have similar experiences and thoughts as some of the characters in 13RW. People often identify with characters they see on TV or in movies.
- However, it is important to remember that there are healthy ways to cope with the topics covered in 13RW and acting on suicidal thoughts is not one of them.
- If you have watched the show and feel like you need support or someone to talk to reach out. Talk with a friend, family member, a counselor, or therapist. There is always someone who will listen.
- Suicide is not a common response to life's challenges or adversity. The vast majority of people who experience bullying, the death of a friend, or any other adversity described in 13RW do not die by suicide.
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- Knowing how to acknowledge and respond to someone who shares their thoughts of emotional distress or suicide with you is important. Don't judge them or their thoughts. Listen. Be caring and kind. Offer to stay with them. Offer to go with them to get help or to contact a crisis line, text or chat service.

- How the guidance counselor in *13 Reasons Why* responds to Hannah's thoughts of suicide is not appropriate and not typical of most counselors. School counselors are professionals and a trustworthy source for help. If your experience with a school counselor is unhelpful, seek other sources of support such as a crisis line, text or chat service.
- While not everyone will know what to say or have a helpful reaction, there are people who do so keep trying to find someone who will help you. If someone tells you they are suicidal, take them seriously and get help.
- When you die you do not get to make a movie or talk to people any more. Leaving messages from beyond the grave is a dramatization produced in Hollywood and is not possible in real life.
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- Hannah's tapes blame others for her suicide. Suicide is never the fault of survivors of suicide loss. There are resources and support groups for suicide loss survivors.

For more resources about getting help for a loved one who is in a mental health crisis, or suicide and suicide prevention, [CLICK HERE](#) or please contact NAMI Maryland (410) 884-8691.

Remember, if you or someone you know needs to talk, contact the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or call 911 immediately in an emergency