

## **13 Reasons to Talk With Your Teen About What They Are Watching**

The buzz in the halls is about a new, edgy Netflix series called “**13 Reasons Why**”, which is based on a book of the same name published by Jay Asher in 2007. This fictional storyline follows the suicide of high school student Hannah Baker told through cassette tapes that she leaves behind, highlighting the 13 reasons why she ended her life. The show is rated **TV-MA** for mature adults only as highly graphic material is shown including a sexual assault scene and a suicide. This Netflix series has sparked tremendous controversy about its impact on young people and about various messaging being delivered in the show about mental health; below, we have provided a list of **13 reasons why it’s necessary to talk to your teen about what they are watching on TV.**

### **1. Teens need adults**

When any show deals with tough topics such as bullying, self-harm, suicide or sexual violence it is important that youth have adults that they can talk to and debrief with about what they have seen and how it makes them feel. The series “13 Reasons Why” portrays very few supportive adults for the youth to reach out to after Hannah’s suicide, which leaves the youth to handle the emotional stress on their own. Being present and talking with your child about tough topics can be difficult, but it can also make them feel more connected to you, and make it easier for them to come to you for support

### **2. Communication about mental health issues is important**

It can be overwhelming and even feel scary to discuss heavy topics. Communicate openly and honestly with your youth about mental illness and discuss resources that may be available to them around topics concerns such as bullying, suicide and mental health.”

### **3. Talking about suicide is important**

Contrary to popular belief, talking about suicide with your teen cannot plant the idea of suiciding in their head. Instead, it creates an opportunity to communicate honestly and openly about a topic that is often kept secret. However, as a sensitive and upsetting topic it is important to talk about suicide in a responsible and safe way. For example, the website [ReportingOnSuicide.org](http://ReportingOnSuicide.org) – which is offered below in our resource guide - presents guidelines to the media about how to go about talking about suicide appropriately, which “13 Reasons Why” fails to model.

### **4. Emotions can be tricky**

Provide a safe space for your teen to process their emotions. Emotionally charged situations (even fictional ones) can bring up emotions in teens that they may not understand. Allowing youth to share how certain situations or experiences have affected them can help them to understand and cope with difficult emotions and process the emotions appropriately.

### **5. Fictional situations can help teens develop empathy**

We encourage you to discuss with your youth how certain characters may have been feeling in particular situations in “13 Reasons Why.” Discussing how these characters may have felt can help your child to develop empathy and understanding; teens who are highly empathetic are

more aware of how their actions may impact others. Below, we reference a link on our resource guide from “Common Sense Media,” which suggests 5 topics to talk about with your teen around this show.”

#### **6. Media impacts real life**

The reality of it is that the things portrayed on TV sometimes happen in real life. Using these scenarios in shows as a starting point to discuss with your teen what they would do if they were in a certain situation can help them to feel prepared for the future.

#### **7. Media doesn't accurately represent real life**

Teens may identify with the characters and their struggles, discuss the reality of suicide and how it can be “sensationalized” by the media. It is important to address that in the show Hannah appears to live on and witness the impact her cassettes had on the people around her, the permanence of death is sometimes lost on teens.

#### **8. Adults are important support systems**

Adults within the show are not portrayed as especially helpful. It is important that teens know that they have people who are there to help. Brainstorm with your teen some adults who they would feel comfortable talking about tough topics with.

#### **9. Address stigma around counseling**

Only one third of people dealing with mental health issues will seek help because of the stigma associated with it. Talk with your teen about why this stigma exists and how there is no shame in seeing a counselor, therapist, or psychologist.

#### **10. Address good ol' peer pressure**

Just because many of your teens' friends are watching this show doesn't mean your teen has to. If your teen is highly sensitive, empathetic, or has experienced trauma, they may find the show especially upsetting and triggering - the show does show the rape of Hannah and another character, as well as Hannah's suicide. Encourage your youth to explore his or her own emotional boundaries to determine if this show is appropriate for them.

#### **11. Help your teen find their power**

Discuss with your teen how they take care of their mental health, what coping strategies they have when they are upset, what they do when they are stressed. The show doesn't offer a hopeful perspective on mental illness and doesn't depict people taking care of their mental health in a positive way and could be used as a conversation starter about taking ownership of your own mental health.

#### **12. Address consent**

Consent is paramount to discuss after viewing “13 Reasons Why.” Empower your teens to know that no one has a right to their bodies in any way without their permission. The show brings awareness to the harsh impact of sexual assault as it relates to the victim but fails to acknowledge the consequences of the perpetrators.

### **13. Increase your own knowledge**

The goal for most parents is to have a happy and healthy teenager. Health as we know is not just physical, it is also mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. There are many resources about encouraging positive mental health in your teen.

#### **Additional Resources**

The Support Network Distress Line  
780 428 HELP

Canadian Mental Health Association: Suicide Information and Toolkits  
<http://us10.campaign-archive1.com/?e=4feac56d68&u=5d342e2b187f90072b609e4f6&id=a17fb50326>

Mental Health and Teens  
<http://rightbyyou.ca>

Mental Health Resources and Support  
<https://mindcheck.ca/>

Tips for talking with teens about suicide  
<http://www.sptsusa.org/parents/talking-to-your-kid-about-suicide/>

Common Sense Media: 5 Conversations to Have With Your Teen After 13 Reasons Why  
[https://www.common sense media.org/blog/5-conversations-to-have-with-your-teens-after-13-reasons-why?utm\\_source=popsugar&utm\\_medium=syndication&utm\\_campaign=advice](https://www.common sense media.org/blog/5-conversations-to-have-with-your-teens-after-13-reasons-why?utm_source=popsugar&utm_medium=syndication&utm_campaign=advice)

A Professional's Perspective on 13 Reasons Why  
<http://www.foxlevineandassociates.com/blog/2017/4/19/13-reasons-why-and-its-unintended-consequences>

Kids Help Phone: Resources  
<http://org.kidshelpphone.ca/resources/>

Kids Help Phone  
1 800 668 6868

Strathcona County Family and Community Services  
780 464 4044