

You should talk to your students about 13 Reasons Why

A public health messaging response from the International Trauma Center.

The school community, students, teachers, parents and the suicide prevention community is buzzing with talk about the new Netflix show 13 Reasons Why. We want to help you think through a response to students who have seen the show and who want to talk about it with you.

There are talking points below sent out by SAVE, a suicide prevention advocacy organization. I'd like to add a few to this list, that are based on our Trauma Informed Care approach to community healing after a suicide.

All the best,

Christopher Vu Gandin Le

From the International Trauma Center

- We fully recognize that 13 Reasons Why is a work of fiction, and in the same way that Romeo and Juliet does not promote healthy suicide prevention messaging, neither does this show. We don't expect it to! What it does do is give us an opportunity to talk about suicide in our community.
- We do not recommend or condone trying to block young people from watching this show. That said, as with all entertainment that is centered around a sensitive and complex human experience, we recommend speaking with young people about their understanding of the content.
- If someone approaches you and wants to talk about the show, don't shame them for having watched it or having interest in watching it. That could increase their perception that suicide is taboo and that even trusted adults aren't willing to talk about it. Instead, engage them in conversation and take the chance to check in with them. For example "What did you think of the show? Is this something you've seen in your friend's group?" They could ask you about any show, why this one in particular?
- Consider hosting conversations around this series at schools. Let the community ask tough questions, have teachers and clinical support staff there. Use it as an

opportunity to learn from young people about why this show resonates so much with them.

- Teens usually turn to each other for help, this is a chance for you as their trusted advisor to inform this dialog and get help for anyone who might be reaching out in crisis.
- If a young person or a friend asks you to keep their suicidal thoughts or behaviors secret, tell them you can't do that. You care about them too much to let them do anything to hurt themselves.
- It's important to link suicide with mental health disorders. Over 90 percent of those that die by suicide have an underlying mental health disorder such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse. These disorders are treatable, and when treated, significantly reduce suicidal ideation.

From SAVE

- 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 opening 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, text or chat service.

- 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. Our counselors are well trained, caring and are prepared to help all of our students.
- 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.
- 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.