

Discussion points for *13 Reasons Why*

May 23, 2018

Many of you, your friends and your kids may be watching the Netflix series, *13 Reasons Why*. Television can be an excellent springboard for discussion – which is what this series is doing, however much of the material is graphic and potentially triggering for vulnerable people, so please be informed of the risks.

With this in mind, we have developed some discussion points and suggestions. If you are the parent of a young person, we suggest you ask if they have, or are, watching the series and use this as an opportunity for open discussion. Some questions to guide the conversation include:

What do you like about the series?

What don't you like?

What could you do differently if you were Hannah and the rest of the cast?

What were the advantages and disadvantages of all the keeping of secrets in the show? There are healthier ways to cope with the feelings Hannah experiences – let's talk about some of them. What are some healthy ways you like to use? What are the things that make you feel happy and that you enjoy?

What should you do if you try to talk to an adult when you are struggling, but you don't feel like they heard you?

Who are the adults in your life that you can talk to when you are struggling?

What would you do if your friend asked you to keep a secret about the fact that they are suicidal? What would be the impact of not promising to keep it a secret?

Some additional points:

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 directly about it.

Knowing how to acknowledge and respond to someone who shares their thoughts of emotional distress or suicide is important. Don't judge them or their thoughts. Listen. Be caring and kind. Stay with them or offer to go with them to get help or to contact a crisis line.

1. **A reminder that this series is fictional.** 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.

2. **Suicide and the reasons for it are very complex.** There is no one single reason why someone takes their life. In fact, 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 the series 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.

3. **Suicide is never glamorous or romantic** as this series may lead someone to believe. Death by suicide is tragic and permanent.

4. 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.** We encourage you to reach out, talk to others, persist in seeking help or finding effective ways of coping.

5. **Suicide is never the fault of survivors of suicide loss.** There are resources and support groups for suicide loss survivors in our community including a peer support group that runs out of [Bereaved Families of Ontario](#), Ottawa office.

6. **Ask if your child's school in Ottawa is running [Sources of Strength](#),** a suicide prevention program that promotes help seeking among youth. For schools that have the program, consider hosting a campaign about breaking codes of silence around suicide and seeking help from adults. For peer leaders in Sources of Strength, remember, if we have a friend who is struggling - with trauma, with suicide thoughts, with substance abuse - we can connect them, not just to one strength, but multiple strengths. Our message has always been to connect to mental health support, but don't stop there - connect to other strengths as well! This show creates opportunities to share real life stories of strengths, of what has helped with trauma, depression, and suicidal thoughts. **A personal story of using your strengths is many times more powerful than a fictional story about trauma. Remember our mission is to bring hope, help, and strength into our communities.**

7. **Encourage help seeking behavior and talk about trusted adults** and resources in our community including walk-in counselling, peer support and support groups and individual counselling. Discuss with youth that the adults in the show were not depicted in an accurate way. There are adults in the school, and in the community who care and who can help. Here are some good numbers to have on hand where you can speak to people who can provide support:

24/7 – [YSB Crisis Line](#) for youth- 613-260-2360 (Youth Services Bureau provides youth and family counselling, crisis support, a 24/7 crisis line)

24/7 - [Distress Centre](#)- 613-238-3311 (the Distress Centre answers calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with crisis line specialists providing confidential support)

[Tel-Aide Outaouais](#)- 613-741-6433 (Francophone mental health crisis support by telephone from 8 a.m. to midnight every day.)

[LGBT Youthline](#)- 1-800-268-9688 (confidential and non-judgmental peer support through telephone, text and chat services from Sunday to Friday, 4:00PM to 9:30 PM).

[Ottawa Sexual Assault Support Centre](#) –613 234 2266 (support line, counselling for survivors of sexual violence-

Key messages

When you are talking about the show, it's important to support young people to understand that:

- Suicide is not inevitable. Treatment works. People do get the help they need.
- It's important to seek help when you are struggling, and while not everyone will know what to say or have a helpful reaction if you ask for help, there are people who do, so keep trying to find someone who will help you.
- Reaching out for help is a sign of bravery, and not a sign of weakness. And if the people you ask for help, don't respond - ask again, and ASK LOUDLY!
- How the guidance counselor in 13RW responds 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.
- 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 the crisis line. There is always someone who will listen.
- If someone tells you they are struggling with suicide, take them seriously and get help.
- If someone tells you they feel empty or hopeless, or unable to go on, ask them to describe it, keep the conversation going and don't be afraid to eventually ask 'are you thinking of suicide'. Be there to listen, and provide empathy.
- Memorializing or decorating someone's locker who died by suicide and/or taking selfies in front of such a memorial does not honor the life of the person who died by suicide and it can be triggering for some people.

Suicide affects everyone and everyone can do something to help if they see or hear warning signs that someone is at risk of suicide. To learn more about suicide prevention consider taking [safeTALK](#) or [ASIST](#) training so you are prepared to help someone who may be having thoughts of suicide.

References: These talking points were adapted from a document prepared by the Suicide Awareness Voices of Education and the Jed Foundation, in collaboration with Netflix. It is also based on messaging from the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council and the Sources of Strength program. For more information, contact Andrea Poncia at aponcia@ysb.ca, or on Twitter [@ottprevention](#).