

13 Reasons Why

Having difficult conversations with your children and teenagers can be challenging for the best of us. Yet we know how important it is to keep the channels of communication open with our children.

Recently in social media and on the news our attention has been drawn to a controversial new TV series available on Netflix, 13 Reasons Why. (Please note that this show is rated MA 15+ and for good reason.) Many of our students are talking about this show. Clearly they are watching it and perhaps you are unaware of its content.

In brief it follows the story of a 17 year old high school student Hannah Blake who takes her own life and leaves a series of 13 cassette tapes for 13 of her friends documenting her reasons as they played in her final decision. At a casual glance, the show may present as a typical American high school drama, but the content is serious, dark and disturbing. It touches on a number of difficult topics including drug use, bullying, cyber-bullying, slut shaming, suicide and rape including a graphic depiction of both the suicide and the rape. It looks at the consequences for teenagers of not just experiencing these events, but also witnessing them as bystanders and failing to speak up and/or take action.

In a recent article making reference to this TV series, the National Association of School Psychologists, in their section on Preventing Youth Suicide, reminds us that we all, schools and families, have a role to play in preventing youth suicide. The NAPS raises serious concerns about the series which, they say, poses significant risk to vulnerable and impressionable youth especially those who have any form of suicidal ideation. The show is powerful in its presentation, yet research shows that graphic and sensationalised accounts of death can be a powerful trigger, or risk factor for youth struggling with mental health conditions.

Please talk to your children about what they are watching on Netflix. If they are watching this series, then we suggest you watch it yourself and talk to your children about what they are seeing, highlighting for them that suicide is not a simple or the only option for people struggling to cope with challenges in their life (as depicted by the program), but rather a combined result of treatable mental illnesses and overwhelming stressors.

For more information:

<https://www.headspace.org.au/news/how-to-talk-to-young-people-about-13-reasons-why/>
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