

Preventing Teen Suicide in Response to '13 Reasons Why'

The latest Netflix hit, *13 Reasons Why* is based on a novel of the same name by Jay Asher. It chronicles fictional teenager Hannah Baker's death by suicide. Before her death, Hannah records a series of 13 tapes, blaming people—and providing reasons—for her death.

While the overarching "be nice to people, because you never know what's going on" narrative of *13 Reasons Why* is meant to be noble, several experts object to the series' depiction of suicide, because it fails to show it on screen safely.

In a forum hosted by Adolescent and Family Behavioral Health Services, staff provided the following tips for suicide prevention, in light of the series.

Watch *13 Reasons Why* with your teenager ... or talk about it.

"Children will likely watch it—with or without your blessing," said Valencia Agnew, Ph.D. With so much access to digital technology, if your teenager wants to watch *13 Reasons Why* and can't watch it under your roof, he or she will likely watch it at a friend's house. Rather than trying to ban the series from your child's Netflix account, watch it with him or her, so you can talk about the content and see how your teen is reacting.

At the very least, ask if your teen has seen the series, and discuss how he or she feels about the content. Again, watch how your teen reacts to the topic and evaluate his or her emotional state.

Watch for warning signs.

AFSP notes there's no single cause for suicide, which most often occurs "when stressors exceed current coping abilities of someone suffering from a mental health condition." Conditions such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse problems increase the risk for suicide—especially when unaddressed. *13 Reasons Why* depicts additional triggers, including sexual assault and bullying. Most people who die by suicide exhibit one or more warning signs, either through what they say or what they do. Find a list of warning signs from www.save.org.

If your teen exhibits warning signs, talk to him or her about it. "Be direct," Dr. Agnew said. "Don't be afraid to ask if they've thought about suicide, or if someone is hurting them."

Talk with your teen, without judgment.

Get teens to tell their stories while they're alive—not after they've made a permanent decision to what could be a temporary problem.

"Listen to your children's comments without judgment," Agnew said. "Doing so requires that you fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said. Put your own agenda aside."

If your teen won't talk to you, try reaching out to prominent adults in your child's life that you trust. You could ask the adults if they've noticed anything unusual—and your child might be willing to talk to other adults about issues.

Validate your teen's feelings.

Feelings aren't always facts—but never downplay your child's stress level or emotions. Instead, try to understand and let your child know you care. "Avoid giving advice to fix it," said Agnew. "Pain isn't going to kill them. It's what they do with the pain."

Get help.

If your child is having thoughts of suicide, reassure him or her that you'll help—then act. You can always take your child to the emergency room for an immediate evaluation, or you can contact a mental health professional. You and your child aren't alone; there are a number of local resources available for help. Visiting www.save.org is a good place to start.