

## Discussion points for *13 Reasons Why*

The Community Suicide Prevention Network of Ottawa is aware that 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 cautious.

With this in mind, we have developed some talking discussion points and suggestions. If you are a parent of a teenager or twentysomething, we suggest you ask if they have watched the series or are watching the series and use this as an opportunity for open discussion.

What do you like about the series?

What don't you like?

What could you do differently if you were Hannah?

There are more healthy 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 suicide like they do in the show? What were the advantages and disadvantages of all the keeping of secrets in the show?

### 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 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.

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.

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.**

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. Find out more at [www.bfo-ottawa.org](http://www.bfo-ottawa.org).

6. **Ask if your child's school in Ottawa is running Sources of Strength**, a program to promote 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.

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. Here are some good numbers to have on hand:

**24/7 – 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** (answers calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with crisis line specialists providing confidential support)

**Francophone crisis support - 613-741-6433** (Tel-Aide Outaouais offers French-language mental health telephone support from 8 a.m. to midnight every day.)

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

## Talking Points

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

- 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. If someone tells you they are struggling with suicide, take them seriously and get help.
- 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 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.

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.

Suicide affects everyone and everyone can do something to help if they see or hear warning signs that someone is at risk of suicide.

*Note: These talking points were taken from a document created by the Suicide Awareness Voices of Education & the Jed Foundation, in collaboration with Netflix. The Ontario School Board and Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council also contributed to developing these.*