



# 13 REASONS WHY ▶

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

# About the show

*13 Reasons Why* is a fictional drama series that tackles tough real-life issues experienced by teens and young people, including sexual assault, substance abuse, suicide and more. This Netflix series focuses on a high school student, Clay Jensen, and his friend Hannah Baker, who died by suicide after experiencing a series of painful events involving school friends, leading to a downward spiral of her mental health and sense of self.

Filmed in a candid and often explicit manner, the series takes an honest look at the issues faced by young people today. The information below

is meant to help viewers understand the various issues presented in Season One of *13 Reasons Why* and to help guide productive conversations around the tough topics the series raises and how these situations can be addressed particularly if viewers resonate with any of the characters.

*13 Reasons Why* seeks to highlight how the behaviors we show others and that are shown to us can be very impactful, the importance of having empathy and compassion for others, even when their struggles aren't obvious, and that everyone matters to many, even when it doesn't feel that way.



# Tips for watching / rewatching Season One

- Hit pause and talk about an issue during an episode. Talking about the scenes as they take place can help young (and old) viewers frame the content in helpful ways.
- Discuss what you think is similar to what you've seen or experienced in your own life and what might be amplified for dramatic emphasis.
- Think about what might be missing that is typical in the real world, but not portrayed in the series. For example, how a teacher or school counselor you know may behave differently from those portrayed in the show.
- If there are scenes that feel uncomfortable to watch, don't feel that you must. Similarly, if there is something you see that feels disturbing, talk with someone—a counselor, a parent, a trusted adult or friend.
- Continue the conversation even after you are done with an episode. If you are a parent or young person concerned about a peer, listen for prompts from others that may indicate an interest in discussing the episode in greater detail. Prompts such as, "I was watching *13 Reasons Why* last night" or a discussion about an actor in the show, could come in the classroom, at the dinner table, in the car, on the way to sports practice, or during homework time. At that point, you can say "tell me more" or "I am so glad that you are telling/asking me this."



# Difficult topics

Difficult but important topics are raised in *13 Reasons Why* Season 1. Below are some tips for talking about these issues:

## Depression

- It's important to encourage open dialog about mental health. Mental health challenges are commonplace and often have onset during the teen or young adult years.
- In the case of the most common mental health condition, depression is a serious illness that causes symptoms that can interfere with one's ability to study, work, sleep, eat and enjoy life. Some signs of depression include: Persistent sadness, decreased energy, overwhelming fatigue, feelings of hopelessness or helplessness, loss of interest in hobbies or daily activities, difficulty concentrating, changes in sleeping patterns, other atypical behaviors for the person such as agitation, irritability or anger outbursts.
- If you think that you may be struggling with depression, seek help from a counselor, pediatrician or mental health professional- if you are a teen, talk to a trusted adult to help you get the help you need right away.



## Self-Harm and Suicide

- While *13 Reasons Why* portrayed a suicide death that already occurred, it's important to know that suicide is known to be a tragic but often preventable health outcome. The vast majority of people who face the challenges portrayed in *13 Reasons Why* find ways to be resilient.
- There's no single cause for suicide. Suicide most often occurs when stressors and health issues converge to create an experience of hopelessness or despair.

- Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide and it is often undiagnosed or undertreated. Conditions like depression, anxiety and substance abuse, especially when left unaddressed, can increase risk of suicide. But, most people who actively manage their mental health lead fulfilling lives.
- Don't be afraid to have a conversation about mental health and suicide—it doesn't increase the risk or plant the idea in someone's head. But it is helpful to invite conversations about feelings, thoughts and perspectives.
- If someone you know is distressed, don't judge or minimize their problems. Be patient, kind and practice active listening skills. Offer to help them get professional help (see list on page 9).
- Look out for possible warnings signs of increased suicide risk:
  - Changes in behavior, especially during a painful event, loss or life transition
  - Talking about harming or killing oneself
  - Expressing feelings of hopelessness, feeling trapped
  - Increased alcohol or drug use
  - Withdrawing from activities, isolating from family and friends
  - Feelings of depression, anxiety, loss of interest, humiliation, rage
- Sometimes people avoid reaching out to someone who may be struggling with mental health, but just having a conversation can make all the difference in helping them to feel connected and supported. Often, it's the first step toward getting what could be life-saving help.
- If you feel you are at risk or suspect a child, friend or loved one is thinking about suicide, talk to a trusted adult or reach out to a resource such as a hotline or text line to talk to someone who can help.

## Bullying

- Bullying is repeated aggressive behavior in which one person in a position of power deliberately threatens, abuses or harms another person physically or emotionally.



- In *13 Reasons Why*, bullying is demonstrated in several forms—physical, verbal, social isolation. Whatever the form, it can be helped by speaking to a trusted adult—a parent, teacher or school counselor.
- Some people may think talking to someone is tattling but it is important to alert trusted adults about issues that may cause harm to oneself or to someone else.
- Because the characters in *13 Reasons Why* play different roles in the various bullying scenarios, these scenes offer a chance to consider how—by playing a different role—bullying can be prevented.
  - Those who Assist: they don't start the bullying behavior, but they encourage bullying and occasionally join in
  - Those who Reinforce: they aren't directly involved in the bullying but they're part of the audience, sometimes laughing or supporting the bullying
  - Those who Defend: they come to the defense of the person being bullied and offer comfort
  - Outsiders: they don't reinforce the bullying behavior, nor do they defend the child being bullied

## Sexual Assault

- Sexual assault, or unwanted sexual contact, is a theme in several episodes of *13 Reasons Why*, providing an opportunity to open a dialogue about issues related to consent, ongoing harassment and peer pressure.
- Some viewers have reported that the show better helped them to recognize sexual assault. For clarity, sexual assault can include:
  - **Rape:** when a person does not or is unable to physically or mentally consent to sex and is *threatened* with force
  - **Sexual coercion:** when someone makes you feel obligated to say yes to a sexual activity by using guilt, pressure, drugs/alcohol or force
  - **Sexual harassment:** includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature in the workplace or school setting. It can also occur in public in the form of catcalling, stalking, groping
- Remember that consent to one sexual activity, such as kissing, doesn't mean that someone has the right to touch further in any way that makes one uncomfortable.



# Starting the Conversation

*13 Reasons Why* is meant to provoke important conversations and watching the show is an opportunity to talk with people about issues that concern you—whether you experience them yourself or you are worried that a friend or young person may be struggling.

If you are not quite sure how to start the conversation, here are some ideas:

- Do you think the characters in the show are behaving in ways that are similar to people you know? How so? How are they different?
- What do you think about what happened in this episode?
- Did parts of the story make you think about how people who are struggling do not show the full

picture of what they are dealing with to others?

- What did you learn about “so-and-so character’s” situation from this episode? For example, what did you learn about what happened to Jessica and sexual assault?
- How does what you have seen change how you view some things that happen in real life?
- Do you think the adults did anything wrong? What could they have done better?
- What would you do if you knew a friend were considering suicide or had been sexually assaulted?
- Who would you go to if you were experiencing any of the situations these teens went through?
- Have you ever felt the way that Hannah, Clay or any of the other characters feel? Which ones?
- Have you ever wanted to tell someone about a sexual assault or bullying but worried that it was tattling?
- How do you know when to offer compassion/support/empathy and when to set clear boundaries?



# Resources

While talking about these issues is important, if you or someone you know is at risk, it is critical to get help from either a trusted adult or a professional resource. Below are some resources to enable you to seek information or additional professional help.



## For immediate help:

- Crisis Text Line: Text TALK to 741741; <https://www.crisistextline.org/>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Talk or chat 1-800-273-TALK <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

## For further help or information:

- [13ReasonsWhy.info](https://13ReasonsWhy.info)
- Depression: <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/publications/depression>
- Anxiety: <https://adaa.org>
- Substance use - drugs: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov>
- Alcohol: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov>
- Suicide prevention: <https://afsp.org>
- Bullying: <https://www.stopbullying.gov>
- Sexual assault: <https://www.rainn.org/get-help>  
Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) offers free 24/7 online chat and a telephone hotline
- After a suicide loss: <https://afsp.org/find-support/ive-lost-someone>