

# 13 Reasons Why, Season 3

Discussion guide for parents



**13 Reason Why is a fictional drama series that tackles real-life issues experienced by young people, including sexual assault, homophobia, child abuse, suicide, termination of pregnancy and more.**

Filmed in a candid and sometimes explicit manner, the series takes a look at some of the issues faced by young people today.

headspace developed the following information that may be helpful for viewers of the show and the wider community. The information aims to assist parents engage in healthy conversations about some of the issues addressed in 13 Reasons Why, Season 3.

The information included aims to make you aware of some of the themes covered in the series, as well as give you information to choose whether it's right for you and your young person to watch. There is also information to support you to look after your young person, where to seek help, and how to have conversations with them about some of the issues addressed in the series.





## Important points to remember

- Some people may be distressed by some of the themes in this series, while others are not. This will depend on individual life experiences and current circumstances. It's important to be respectful of other people's experiences.
- Remember, this is TV, dramatised for viewer engagement, designed to entertain. The characters and events may not be realistic representations for every viewer.
- You may not be aware if your young person or their peers have had experiences similar to those of the characters in the series. Having open conversations can help to know when further support is necessary. It can help to keep this in mind in the days and weeks during and after your young person is exposed to the show (through peers or by watching).

## Tips for discussing the show safely

- Do some research and get informed about the show – try to watch it if you can.
- Consider if it is age appropriate.
- Try to have discussions about the show when everyone is feeling calm.
- Talk about your reasons for concern.
- Understand their desire to watch the series. Understanding their point of view doesn't mean agreeing with them but it may help to keep the conversation going.

## If you and your young person decide to watch the series, it might be useful to consider some of the following:

- Take breaks and do soothing things between episodes (for example; go for a walk, share a meal with someone, do some exercise, spend time with friends).
- Ensure they watch with a support person or watch it together.
- Identify what episodes or themes are likely to be more difficult. Then, agree on whether to skip this part, or write a list of things that are likely to help. These are likely to be the same things that help a person uses to cope in other stressful situations.
- Model good self care behaviours.
- Remember to keep checking in with your young person.
- Know where to go for professional support if this becomes necessary and support them to get professional care. There is a list of professional support options included.

## Questions to help start the conversation:

- 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 [choose a specific character] situation from this episode?
- Does anything you've watched in the series change your perspective on something you've experienced yourself?
- Do you think the adults did anything particularly helpful or unhelpful? What was helpful about what they did? Or, what could they have done differently?
- What part of the show do you relate to the most?
- Have you experienced anything like the characters in the show?
- Who would you go to if you were experiencing any of the situations these teens went through?
- Have you ever felt the way that any of the other characters feel?
- How do you know when to offer compassion/support/empathy and when to set clear boundaries?
- Do you know anyone that might be in trouble or need help?

## Where to get help

**For immediate help contact:  
triple zero (000) if it is an emergency**

### National 24/7 crisis services:

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 or  
[suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

beyondblue: 1300 224 636 or [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

### Additional youth support services include:

headspace: visit [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au) to find your nearest centre or call eheadspace on 1800 650 890

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

ReachOut: [reachout.com](http://reachout.com)

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 [sane.org](http://sane.org)



# suicide

- Suicide is a complex issue with many contributing factors, including individual personality characteristics, coping styles, life history of experiences, current circumstances, support networks, and mental health difficulties.
  - Unfortunately, thinking about suicide is more common than it should be. Despite this, it is still a serious sign that things are not OK.
  - Thoughts of suicide can occur when life circumstances have been difficult and stressful, such as after a major loss or traumatic event.
  - Some young people have thoughts of suicide when life seems unbearable and they want to end their pain. Most young people who have thoughts of suicide may not want to die, they just can't imagine another way out of what they are going through.
  - It's important to know that young people can and DO get through these times in their lives. Most young people who've had thoughts of suicide find a way to work through them. With effective treatment, social support and time, many who have tried to end, or considered ending their lives can go on to live full, meaningful and productive lives.
  - It can be hard for young people to share if they are experiencing thoughts of suicide. Things to look out for that indicate you should be more proactive in providing support are: increased isolation, hopelessness, withdrawal, avoidance, an increase in unpredictable behaviour (e.g. drug and alcohol use). Some other circumstances include:
    - recent discharge from psychiatric care
    - previous suicide attempt, or self harm
    - recent presentation to hospital emergency department for self harm or suicide
    - knowing someone who is experiencing thoughts of suicide, has attempted to suicide or has suicided.
  - A close and trusting relationship with adults increases the chance a young person will seek help during tough times. Strategies to improve the relationship between key adults and young people will help reduce the risk of suicide.
  - If you are concerned your young person may be experiencing suicidal thinking, it is important to start a conversation. Some things to consider when approaching the conversation:
    - find the right time. This might be when you're both feeling calm and safe
    - it is OK to ask directly if they have been thinking about suicide. Research shows that doing this in a safe and respectful way does not increase the likelihood that they will carry out suicidal behaviour
    - you might choose to be specific about what you have seen that gives you concern
    - really try to hear them out and understand their experience. Although it may be difficult, it is important to try to remain calm and composed if your young person tells you they are experiencing suicidal thinking. This is likely to help them to feel in control
    - try to understand whether you both feel like you are able to keep safe until seeking professional support. Keeping safe might include; making sure they're not alone, developing a list of things that are particularly hard and staying away from them, or developing a list of things that are helpful and trying to do them. If this feels possible together, continue to check in until professional support is accessed. This should be as soon as possible. If you do not feel that you're able to keep safe, seek immediate support.
    - as hard as it can be, try to remain calm and available. This can help to keep the conversation going, and may help to understand what support you can provide.
  - It is OK to be upset if your young person discloses suicidal thinking. It can be really hard to understand, but it can be useful to try to use it as an opportunity to connect with them.
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# sexual assault

- Sexual assault is when someone is forced or tricked into sexual acts without consent or against their will. Sexual assault is a crime and never the fault of the person experiencing it.
- Sexual assault can happen between strangers, acquaintances or people in intimate relationships.
- If your young person tells you they have been sexually assaulted you might feel shocked, angry, protective, powerless and/or worried – all of these feelings are normal.
- Keep in mind that young people will look to you to be in control and stay calm. Staying calm will help you to hear them out and listen to what they need, and help you plan what to do next.
- If you and your young person need professional advice on what steps to take next you could consider contacting [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au). They can help you understand what the options are for you and how to respond to everyone involved.
- People with lived experience of sexual assault can go through a range of difficult feelings after an assault, including anger, rage, guilt, embarrassment, powerlessness, or feeling threatened, fearful, isolated, sad and confused. They can also experience flashbacks, avoiding particular people, places or events. And they may experience difficulties in relationships or have trouble concentrating.
- With the right support people who have experienced sexual assault can recover and live full and meaningful lives.
- Building healthy, respectful and reciprocal relationships helps protect everyone. A crucial part of respectful relationships is knowing about consent for any sexual interaction. Consent involves knowing that:
  - consent must be given freely, fully, consciously and voluntarily
  - someone can always change their mind about what they consent to whenever they choose.

If a young person or your child confides in you, below are some useful guides in how to respond.

## Do:

- take them seriously
- listen to them, and believe what they say
- make sure they're safe. Support them to talk with a professional service and/or the police
- acknowledge that it must have been difficult for them to talk with you
- let them know they did the right thing by telling you
- ask them what they need from you. Ask them what might be helpful in supporting them
- ask permission to check in with them again in the future.

## Don't:

- dismiss them, justify someone else's behaviour or judge them
- ignore them, or pretend it didn't happen
- listen and then not follow up or help them to get additional support
- tell them to get over it or forget about it
- expect them to tell you everything
- tell others about anything they've told you, without having talked to them about it first. Telling others must only be about seeking support, and should be done in consultation with the person.



# homophobia

- Homophobia is a term used to describe prejudice and discrimination against people based on their same sex attraction. This can take the forms of fear, bullying, hostility and hatred, as well as negative attitudes and beliefs.

Examples include:

- verbal abuse
- social exclusion
- humiliation
- rumours
- threats
- put down ‘jokes’
- physical violence.

- The impact of homophobia can have immediate and long term effects on physical and emotional health and wellbeing as well as contribute to feelings of confusion, shame, isolation and low self-esteem.
- Not all people who experience homophobia respond in the same way, people who are targeted are at greater risk of suicide, self harm and alcohol and drug use.
- Social exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation are responsible for poor health outcomes in the LGBTIQ+ community, not an individual’s sexual orientation or identity.
- Finding communities of acceptance, inclusion and celebration overcome poor health outcomes.
- Developing a same sex attraction in an environment of homophobia may lead to thoughts of shame and isolation, making it more difficult for someone to share their sexual orientation with others.

## What you can do:

It’s important to engage with young people about the topic of homophobia and how it can negatively impact people’s lives. Discuss with your young person how they can challenge homophobia if they experience it themselves or witness it happening to someone else. They can:

- call out homophobia if it’s safe to do so
- support whoever is being targeted
- let the LGBTIQ+ people in their life know they are a friend.

**It’s important to engage with young people suspected of being discriminated for their sexual orientation, provide reassurance, and respectfully ask about their situation, while understanding they may not necessarily feel like talking.**

There are six key steps for parents if their young person tells them they have been discriminated for their sexual orientation:

1. listen calmly to what your young person wants to say and make sure you get the full story
  2. reassure your young person that they are not to blame and ask open and empathetic questions to find out more details
  3. ask your young person what they want to do and what they want you to do
  4. discuss with your young person some sensible strategies to handle the discrimination
  5. contact the school and stay in touch with them
  6. check in regularly with your young person.
- Remember, discrimination is a crime. You can make a complaint to [humanrights.gov.au](https://www.humanrights.gov.au)

# child abuse and neglect

- Child abuse and neglect is when someone under the age of 18 is harmed by an adult – a parent, caregiver or other adults. It can take a number of forms including:
  - physical abuse
  - emotional abuse
  - neglect
  - sexual abuse
  - exposure to family violence.
- Child abuse and neglect is a crime. It's never OK and it's never the fault of the person experiencing the abuse. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call triple zero (000).
- If you and your young person need professional advice on what steps to take next you could consider contacting [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au). They can help you understand what the options are for you, and how to support everyone involved.
- Whilst going through difficult emotions, it can be hard to be available for your young person as much as you might want to be. It helps to be aware of some of the things to look out for.
  - People with lived experience of child abuse and neglect can go through a range of difficult feelings including anger, rage, guilt, embarrassment, powerlessness, or feeling threatened, fearful, isolated, sad, and confused. They can also experience flashbacks, avoiding particular people or places or events, difficulty in relationships and trouble concentrating. Looking for regular opportunities to check in, and making shared plans on how to move forward with this challenge is important.
  - People who have experienced child abuse and neglect are at higher risk of developing drug and alcohol issues, mental health difficulties and are at increased risk of self harm and suicide.
  - With the right support people who have experienced child abuse and neglect can recover and live full and meaningful lives.
  - Exposure to an experience of child abuse and neglect elicits strong emotions. Keep in mind that young people will look to you to be in control and stay calm. Staying calm helps you to hear them out and listen to what they need, and help you plan what to do next.
  - It's important to seek help early. This helps to reduce the severity and duration of the impact of trauma.

If your young person lets you know they have been abused, it can be hard to know how to respond. Below are some useful guides.

## Do:

- take them seriously
- listen to them, and believe what they say
- make sure they're safe. Support them to talk with a professional service and/or the police
- acknowledge that it must have been difficult for them to talk with you
- let them know they did the right thing by telling you
- ask them what they need from you. Ask them what might be helpful in supporting them
- ask permission to check in with them again in the future.

## Don't:

- dismiss them, justify someone else's behaviour or judge them
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# termination of pregnancy

- Terminating a pregnancy (also known as an abortion) can be a complex decision and there may be a number of reasons why someone chooses this option. This can be a stressful time, so it is important to ensure the health and wellbeing of the woman seeking support.
- Freedom of choice, and access to quality health information is a fundamental component of health care in Australia.
- There are two methods of terminating a pregnancy, surgical and by medication. Surgical termination is a day surgery while termination by medication is the use of specific medication to end a pregnancy.
- With surgical termination, there is a choice between a local anaesthetic where you are awake, or a general anaesthetic where you are unconscious. This decision, like all medical procedures, is made in consultation with your doctor.
- These procedures are performed at specialist clinics and hospitals, and the specific laws around access to termination differ from state to state.
- Everyone responds differently to the termination of a pregnancy. It can bring up a range of feelings including guilt, anger, self-blame or relief.
- Some women recover quickly after a termination, however others may recover over a longer period or benefit from additional support.
- If your young person seems to be having a tough time, they may want to reach out to someone for support. They might want to talk with you, or to a trusted friend, family member, teacher, counsellor, an Elder or a professional service. You might also find this after termination of pregnancy resource helpful.

## How to support your young person:

- let them know you are there to support them
- do some research and help your young person get accurate, unbiased information such as from Pregnancy Counselling
- try to remain calm and available. This can help your young person feel comfortable to keep the conversation going
- ask them about how they feel and what they are thinking. This helps you to understand how you might be able to help
- consider how you might support them in accessing professional support. You may offer to accompany them to an appointment or stay with them during the recovery period
- offer to help plan their day with them
- check in with them to see if they are OK
- support them to keep a routine and keep doing the things that are important for their mental health and wellbeing.

If you would like further information on sexual health, contraception and termination of pregnancy, Family Planning Alliance Australia has links to the family planning clinics in your state.



headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.



headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.



headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.

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