

# 13 Reasons Why, season 4

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 to engage in healthy conversations about some of the issues addressed in 13 Reasons Why, season 4.

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 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?



# 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.
  - Studies conducted in the [United States](#) and [Canada](#), following the release of 13 Reasons Why showed some increased risk in young people which these reports attributed to content included in series. It is unclear the cause of this increase but likely to be related to unsafe depiction and reporting of suicide.
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# 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
- 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.



# **grief**

- Grief happens after experiencing loss. There are many types of loss, such as a loss of a relationship through break-up, a family unit through separation, virginity or sexual freedom; loss of social standing; loss of a friendship group through bullying or rumours, or the loss of a loved one.
- The grief that happens after loss is different for everyone. It can be different in duration and intensity. Commonly it is incredibly painful. There are many ways a person can experience grief:
  - how you feel: shock, disbelief, numbness, pain, intense sadness, anger, resentment, regret, guilt, abandonment, anxiety or worry
  - what you think: Thinking about all of the details of the loss, imagining a different future or past, having flashbacks or re-experiencing episodes, thinking that things don't matter any more, or you don't care, having trouble concentrating or remembering things
  - what you do: Some people find themselves doing a lot to keep busy, while others stop doing a lot of the things they normally do.
- If you notice the things above happening for someone you're caring for, there are a number of things you can do to support them:
  - let them know that grieving is OK, and it's OK to be sad
  - try to help them name and understand the feelings they're experiencing
  - listen to their concerns and try to understand what it is about their experience of grief that is causing them distress
  - try to keep things as 'normal' as possible in the home. Grief can bring up feelings of being unsafe or insecure, so anything that promotes safety can help. Sometimes these are routine activities
  - support your young person to maintain their participation in school or work or study
  - help them to look after themselves in key areas, such as: good sleep habits, eating well, staying active, staying connected to family and friends, keeping up hobbies that are important to them, reducing alcohol and other drug use, and working with them to find new ways to handle tough times
  - regularly check in with them. If it appears they don't feel comfortable with you, support them to talk with someone you trust.
- If the impact of grief includes the following, it might be time to reach out:
  - ongoing major sleep troubles
  - ongoing withdrawal from school or study, or major academic troubles
  - hopelessness about the future
  - relationship troubles or conflict with friends and family
  - doing things out of character; such as increased or more unpredictable use of alcohol and other drugs, or sexual behaviour
  - regularly checking in with your young person can help to know what they might need to get through this tough time. Supporting them to keep up 'normal' living can be important.


# gun violence

- Incidents of mass violence are rare in Australia because guns are not as accessible here as in the US, but scenes relating to gun violence can still be impactful. If you are distressed, you can:
  - stop watching
  - check in with a family member or friend and seek support
  - get some information from reputable sources.





# drug use

- If your young person is distressed by scenes involving drug use:
    - let them know they're safe, and that you're there for them
    - give them some time before asking too many questions, if it looks like they need it. This might be in a quiet and calm place where they can do some calm breathing
    - try to understand what it is about the scene that has distressed them, as people will take different meaning out of the same content
    - let them know that being shocked or upset is ok, and it's ok to be sad
    - try to help them name and understand the feelings they're experiencing
    - ask them what they need from you. It's ok if they don't know. You could work on identifying what that is together.
  - If you want to talk with your young person about drug use, there are some key points that can help guide these conversations, which are best held regularly:
    - do some research and get informed
    - try not to have important discussions about drug use when either person is upset or angry. They are best held when all people are feeling calm and safe, and the conversation is held from a position of care and support
    - be approachable and composed. You may be surprised by what you find out. To keep the relationship and exchange of information going, stay composed and share the challenge together. This might be hard if you're having strong reactions, so plan ahead about how to manage this
    - try to understand what it is that contributes to their drug use; this is often varied, and can include: handling tough times, feeling alone or isolated, wanting to fit in, feeling pressured to try it. Understanding why someone is using alcohol or other drugs can help to inform the next step
    - listening to them doesn't mean you agree with them. It means that you're in the best place to support them
    - support them to get professional care if this option comes up
    - support them to build the skills to make decisions in tough times, including looking at the consequences and risks of drug use. It is important to do this in a realistic and informed way
    - talk about clear boundaries or expectations from you. If this can happen in a shared way it is more likely to be useful
    - look to identify the benefits of decreased use (e.g. increased mood, concentration, energy, motivation, sleep, relationships)
    - keep the conversations going.
  - It is important to support your young person to make small changes, and to be patient. The process of reducing and cutting out drug use is a learning process that can take time. They will need your support when they have difficulties in following their plans.
  - Most of the time, young people come to their own conclusion that drug use is getting in the way of them being the person they want to be, or doing what they want to do.
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## 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)



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.