



13 Reasons Why

Discussion guide for parents

NETFLIX

 **headspace**

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, bullying, suicide, gun violence and more.

This Netflix series focuses on high school student, Clay Jensen and the aftermath following his friend Hannah Baker's death 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 a look at the issues faced by young people today.

headspace and Netflix have collaborated to develop the following information that may be helpful for viewers of the show and the wider community. It can be helpful to use the show as an opportunity to talk with your young person about topics that may otherwise go unspoken.

The information below aims to assist parents engage in healthy conversations about some of the issues addressed in 13 Reasons Why.

It also includes some suggestions for how to respond to these appropriately and spur productive discussions around these themes.

Important points to remember:

- Some people may be distressed by some of the themes in the series, while others are not. This will depend on individual life experiences and current circumstances. It is important to be respectful of other people's experiences.
- Remember, this is TV, dramatized for viewer engagement, designed to entertain. This season endeavors to present challenging issues in a meaningful way, to acknowledge the experiences young people may go through. The characters may not be realistic representations for every viewer.
- Unfortunately, the themes explored in this series are far too common among young people. 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, but there are also other signs to look out for (covered below). 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 all people are 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:

- Find out what content is coming up at 13ReasonsWhy.info
- 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
- 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 below
- Model good self care behaviours
- Remember to keep checking in with them



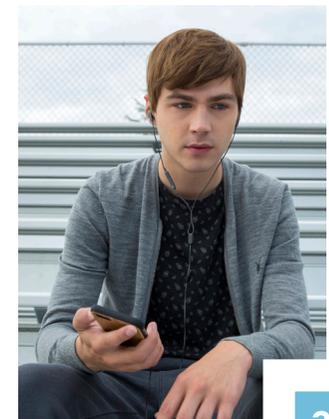
Questions to help start the conversation:

- 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 would you do if you knew a friend was considering harming themselves or others?
- What part of the show do you relate to the most?
- Do you know someone who has been sexually assaulted?
- 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 Hannah, Clay or any of the other characters feel?
- Have you ever wanted to tell someone about bullying or harm that was happening to someone you know but worried that it was tattling?
- 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?

Tough but important topics are raised in *13 Reasons Why*. Here are some tips for talking about these issues:

Suicide

- The show examines how different people process Hannah's death. When talking to young people about how Hannah's suicide is depicted in Season 2 it is important to **reiterate that death is final**. The person who has died is not able to know what happens after. Although they can be 'held in heart and mind' by loved ones, they are not able to communicate after their death.
- **Remember 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.
- **Don't focus on the method of the suicide**. Avoid talking graphically or in detail about how a person has suicided. Detailed descriptions of the death can be overwhelming and distressing, and may increase the risk of imitation by vulnerable young people. Keep the focus on how to manage the emotions brought up by the suicide and away from details of how someone 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**.
- Young people experience a lot of changes between the ages of 12-25, and particularly between 14-18. This includes biological, social and psychological changes that significantly impact how they handle tough times. **Young people may have times when they are less able to handle difficulty**, and require additional support, particularly from family and friends.
- **It can be hard for young people to share if they are experiencing thoughts about suicide**. Things to look out for that indicate you should be more proactive in providing support are: increasing isolation, hopelessness, withdrawal, avoidance. Self harm, increased life stressors (e.g. bullying, relationship breakdown, exam stress), an increase in unpredictable behaviour (e.g. outbursts, increased risky sexual or drug and alcohol behaviour) may also be signs that a young person needs support.
- **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:
 - Be prepared, and do some research
 - 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**.
- **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.
- After someone dies by suicide, **loved ones can feel guilty or look to find people to blame**. Whilst this can feel like a natural response, it is inconsistent with the knowledge that suicide is complex, and there is no one reason for a suicide.
- **Looking at suicide in retrospect seems more straightforward than it is**. There are times when some people can show a lot of the recognised signs, yet remain safe and connected. Other times people do not show any outward or obvious signs, yet they are in such isolation and distress they suicide, which results in shock and despair.
- **It can be incredibly difficult to recognize early warning signs, or to predict when someone is really struggling**. That's why it's important to regularly check in with people and to develop close relationships and support networks, as it can help reduce the risk of suicidal thinking taking over.

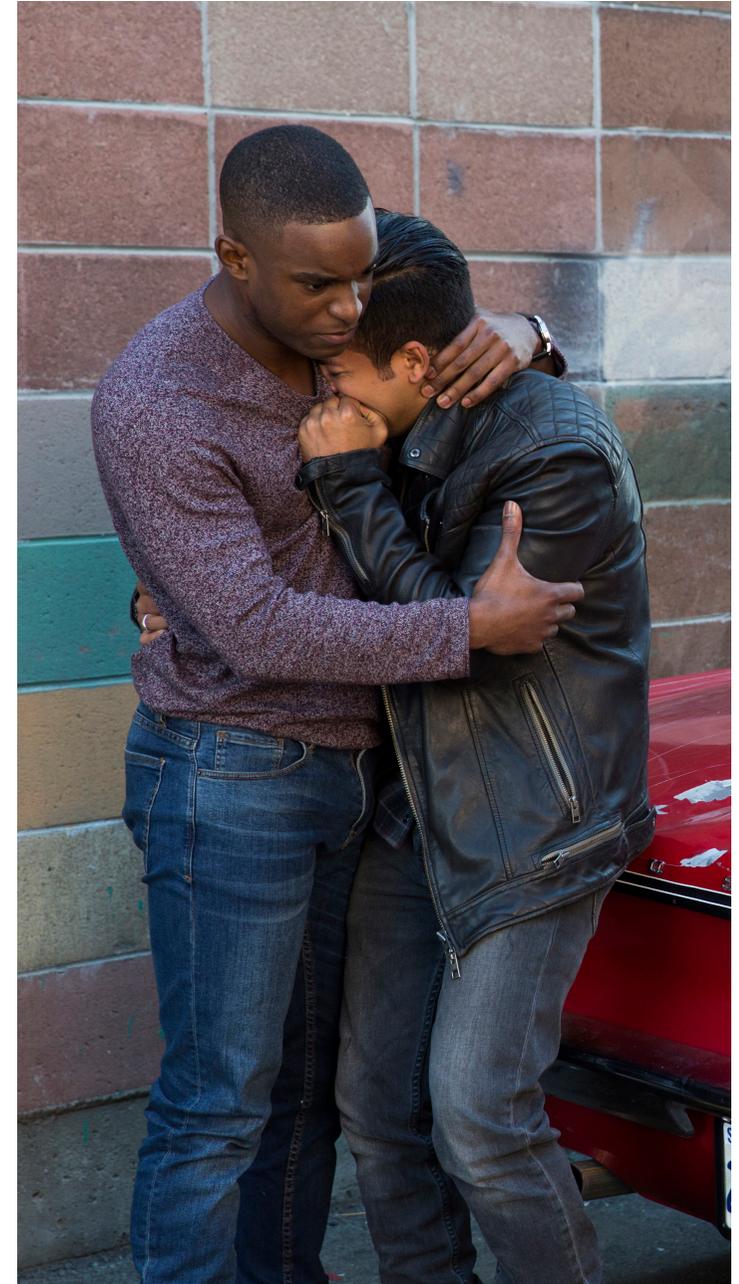


Grief

- **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.**



Bullying

- Bullying is repeated verbal, physical, and/or social behaviour by one or more people towards someone with an intention to cause fear, distress or harm.
- Bullying is not just ‘playing around’ or harmless fun. **Experiencing bullying can have serious immediate and long-term consequences**, and increase the risk of developing mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.
- **Bullying can take many forms.** It can be:
 - physical (e.g., hurting people or their property)
 - verbal (e.g., insults / teasing or threatening others),
 - and/or relational (e.g. excluding people or spreading rumours).
- **Bullying can occur in many different environments:** face-to-face, over the phone or online (cyberbullying). Cyberbullying can be particularly difficult as it can happen anonymously, 24 hours a day.
- **Bullying is highly contextual and dynamic.** The same person can be a bully, bystander or victim. Each of these different roles has a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing, and can increase the risk of experiencing mental health problems.
- **Those involved in bullying, as both a victim and perpetrator, are at the greatest risk of self-harm and suicide.**
- Although not all people who experience bullying develop thoughts or feelings about suicide, people involved in bullying, including the victim and perpetrator, are at a greater risk of self-harm and suicide. This does not mean that bullying causes suicide. Instead, it suggests that bullying may be one of a number of major life challenges that contributes to distress, and may be a precipitating factor in some circumstances when accompanied by a number of other risk factors.
- **Responding to bullying behaviour is not solely the responsibility of either parents or schools.** Research indicates that bullying is most likely to happen during school years. Therefore, interventions that position parents and schools as partners in responding to this issue are most likely to be effective.

- More than one method of addressing bullying may be needed as **no single approach is appropriate or effective in all circumstances or for all people.**
- **Dealing with bullying can be complex and challenging.** Both short and long-term approaches need to be adopted, including regular reviews of policy and procedures and monitoring of progress using the school’s data.



What can parents do to support someone who has been bullied?

It’s important to engage with young people suspected of being bullied, 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 child tells them they have been bullied:

1. **listen** calmly to what your child wants to say and make sure you get the full story
2. **reassure** your child that they are not to blame and ask open and empathetic questions to find out more details
3. **ask** your child what they want to do and what they want you to do
4. **discuss** with your child some sensible strategies to handle the bullying – starting a fight is not sensible
5. **contact** the school and stay in touch with them
6. **check in** regularly with your child.

What if the bullying is online?

- Don't respond to the people cyberbullying.
- Keep evidence of what is sent – emails, texts, instant messages and comments on social media.
- Block the people bullying online
- Ask your young person what they want to do, and what they want you to do
- Develop with your child some sensible strategies to handle the bullying
- Work with your young person, and contact the school if the person bullying is at school. Work with the school to develop a coordinated response
- Continue to check in with your young person, to make sure they are safe
- **If bullying continues and you feel afraid or threatened, report to the eSafety Commissioner or the police**

What do I do if I suspect my child is a bully?

Young people who bully others need to understand that their behaviour is not acceptable and to learn more appropriate ways to behave and to resolve conflicts. If a parent suspects their child has been bullying others, they can talk to their child about:

- why they have been behaving this way
- taking responsibility for their behaviour
- how to sort out differences and resolve conflicts
- how to treat others with respect
- the effect of bullying on others
- the need to repair harm they have caused to others
- the need to restore relationships.

Parents may also like to talk to their child's school to come up with a plan to help their child learn more appropriate ways to behave, or talk to **headspace**.



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 victim's fault.**
- 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:
 - Nobody can touch another person sexually without their consent
 - This consent must be given freely, fully, consciously and voluntarily
 - Someone can always change their mind about what they consent to whenever they choose.
- If your young person tells you they have been sexually assaulted **you might feel shocked, angry, protective, and/or worried.**
- 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 www.1800respect.org.au** They can help you understand what the options are for you.
- 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 can help to be aware of some of the things to look out for.
- 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, confused. They can also experience flashbacks, avoiding particular people or places or events, difficulty in relationships and trouble concentrating, among others. **Looking for regular opportunities to check in, and making shared plans on how to move forward with this challenge is important.**

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 or the police.
- Acknowledge that it must have been difficult for them to talk with you.
- Ask them what they need from you. Talk with them about the impact the experience has had on them, and what is helpful in supporting them through.
- 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 cheer up, 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.



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.



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 your young person is distressed by the scenes relating to gun violence, you can:

- Encourage them to stop watching
- Ensure they check in with a family member or friend and seek support
- Get some information from reputable sources



Where to get help

For immediate help contact: 000 if it is an emergency

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au)
- **Suicide Call Back Service:** 1300 659 467 or [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)
- **beyondblue:** 1300 224 636 or [beyondblue.org.au](https://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Additional youth support services include:

- **headspace:** visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au) to find your nearest centre or call headspace on 1800 650 890
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800 [kidshelpline.com.au](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au)
- **ReachOut:** [reachout.com](https://www.reachout.com)
- **SANE Australia:** 1800 187 263 [sane.org](https://www.sane.org)