



# 13 Reasons Why

Discussion guide for young people

**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, contributing 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. The show may resonate with you and your friends because of experiences you've had at your own school or in your daily life.

**headspace** and Netflix have collaborated to develop the following information that may be helpful for viewers of the show and the wider community. **The information below aims to assist you to safely watch the series, look after yourself and have conversations with your friends and families about some of the issues addressed in 13 Reasons Why.**



## Important points to remember:

- It's likely a lot of people will be talking about the series. It's important to be respectful and informed. The information included here can help to keep people safe and connected.
- 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.

## Tips for watching the show safely:

- If you are likely to be affected by any of the themes covered in the show, it is important to consider whether you watch it. You might choose not to, which is ok. Reading about some of the themes in the show can help you decide.
- If you choose to watch, you could make a plan to look after yourself. This might be with the support of family and friends. Letting them know what you might struggle with, and how they can help is likely to be useful.
- Your support plan could include self care options such as:
  - Take breaks between episodes
  - Check in with family and friends between episodes
  - Get information from reputable sources about the themes covered in the show
- Take time to look after yourself. Some self care tips include: prioritising sleep, eating well, staying active, maintaining close relationships with family and friends, learning ways to handle hard times (journaling, listening to music, quiet time out, relaxation), reducing alcohol and other drug use, to keep on doing the things in your life that are fun and important to you.

Tough but important topics are raised in *13 Reasons Why*. Here are some tips for safely watching and responding to these topics:

## Suicide

- If there's something happening in your world that you want to change, there are lots of options available. You can be a part of the solution. **Seeking support and building a network of people who care about the issue is an important step.**
- **Suicide is complex.** There are many factors that can influence someone's experience of suicidal thinking, and it is not helpful to simplify it down to a handful of contributing factors.
- Unfortunately, thinking about suicide is more common than it should be. Despite this, it is still a serious sign that things are not ok. **If you are experiencing suicidal thinking it is important to share this with a trusted adult.** Remember that suicidal thinking is changeable, and it does not mean that there is anything wrong with you.
- **Sometimes it can be hard to find a sense of hope. Seeking support helps.** It helps people to understand:
  - How to stay safe
  - What things contribute to suicidal thinking
  - How to manage and overcome the things that contribute to suicidal thinking
  - How to manage suicidal thinking
  - What to do when things get really tough
  - How to create a life with meaning, purpose and fulfilment.
- How much, and how seriously people think about suicide changes from person to person, and also within the same person across time. **It's important to know that even when times feel hopeless, things can change.**
- **The experience of suicidal thinking is often accompanied by other difficulties,** such as: mental health concerns, drug and alcohol use and misuse, family dysfunction, issues at school, relationship problems, bullying, exam or study pressure, social isolation. If these are things impacting you, **it is important tell a trusted adult in your life** (parents, carers, family network, teachers, professionals) to develop support plans. These can help to prevent things getting worse.
- **Remember 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 their loved ones, they are not able to communicate after their death.
- **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.
- **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 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 these things are happening for you, the first thing to know is that's ok. Grief can be a difficult time. Here are some things that can be useful in the grieving process:
  - **Be ok with feeling down.** Find someone you trust to share these feelings with.
  - **Try to maintain as many of the routine parts of life as you can,** e.g. school or work or study, keeping in touch with friends or family.
  - **Take some time to prioritise looking after yourself.** This can include: working on keeping good sleep habits, trying to eat well, getting some exercise, maintaining any hobbies, connecting with family and friends.
  - **Connect with people you trust.** Share what you're going through. Being heard and understood can help to navigate the really hard times. You might need to keep persisting if you don't have any luck first time.

- **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.



# 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.



## What do I do if I’m being bullied?

### Face-to-face

- Stay calm and try not to get upset or angry. This can be what the bully wants you to do.
- Don’t fight back. It can make the situation worse, or you can get blamed for starting trouble or get hurt.
- Try to ignore it and walk away calmly.
- If the person bullying tries to block you, be firm and clear. Tell them to stop.

- Get away from the situation as soon as possible and tell a trusted adult what has happened straight away.

### Online

- Don’t respond to people cyberbullying.
- Talk to your parents, teacher or trusted adult about what’s happening.

- Keep evidence of what is sent to you – emails, texts, instant messages and comments on social media. Give them to a trusted adult.

- Block the people bullying online.

- **If bullying continues and you feel afraid or threatened, report to the eSafety Commissioner or the police.**



# 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 you feel unsafe or at risk of sexual assault, get support. **You could contact [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au), police, a school counsellor or a trusted adult.**
- 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.**

- **It can be very difficult to talk with others about the experience or reach out for support. If you're finding it hard that is ok. It is important to try to seek support, such as from your family, a teacher, school counsellor, your GP, police or a professional service like [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)**



## If a friend lets you know they have been sexually assaulted, it can be hard to know how to respond. Below are some useful guides in responding.

### Do:

- Take them seriously.
- Listen to them, and believe what they say.
- Ask them if they're safe. Support them to talk with a trusted adult.
- Ask for their permission to share the information with a trusted adult.
- Acknowledge that it must have been difficult for them to talk with you. Ask them what they need from you.
- Ask permission to check in with them again in the future.
- If they are, or you are worried about their safety, let them know you need to talk to a trusted adult. Ask them who they would like to tell, and see if they want to do this together. If no trusted adult is available this can be a professional service, such as [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

### 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

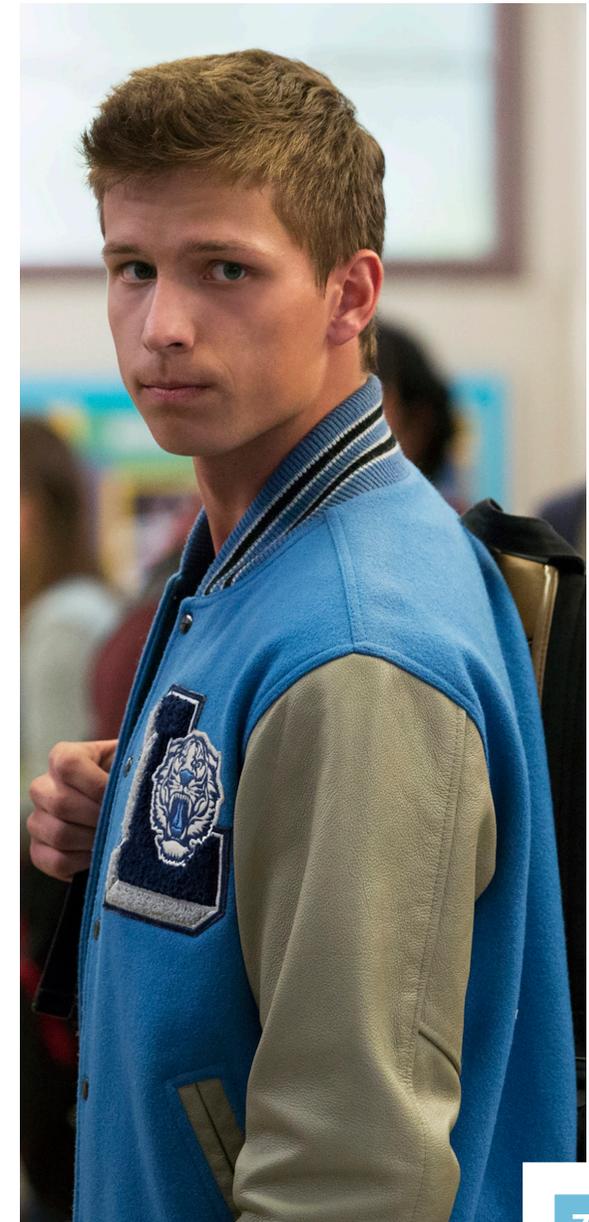
- **If you are with someone and you're worried they may have overdosed call 000 immediately for medical support. You won't get in to trouble for asking for help.**
- If you're distressed by the overdose scene or if it brings up memories of past difficulties, take a break. It is important to do things to look after yourself, such as:
  - Be close to supportive family and friends
  - Have some time by yourself in a safe place
  - Listen to music
  - Go for a walk
- **If you're not confident with the strategies above, it's important to stay with people you trust and who care about you.** Let them know you're struggling, and make a plan together to get through these hard times. Some will be short term, and others might be longer term, like seeking professional support. headspace offers support if you're concerned about your alcohol and/or other drug use.
- **If you're concerned about a friend who's using drugs, having conversations with them about drug use is important.** If these conversations are guided by the following principles they're most likely to be useful:
  - They come from a place of care and wanting the best for your friend.
  - They're based on trust
  - You try to keep them safe and look out for them
  - You try to understand why drug use is important to them.
  - You're patient with them
  - You support them to make any changes they want to make. It's ok to start small.
  - You support them to get professional support if the ask
  - If they have a setback, you're there to support them. They will be disappointed too, so don't be too hard on them.
  - There are opportunities to look at the impact of drug use (e.g. is it stopping them from being the person they want to be, or are they missing out on things that are important to them?)
  - There are opportunities to look at the benefits of reducing or cutting out drug use (e.g. increased mood, concentration, energy, motivation, sleep, relationships).

- This is a lot to ask of a friend. **Sometimes it may get too much for you, and you may need a break to look after yourself, which is ok.** It is important to prioritize self care.
- If you are worried about your drug use and want to reduce, it can be important to build a network of people who can support you through this, e.g. family, friends, GP or professional support services. It's best to get professional support while detoxing if you can.



# 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



## 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)