

## CCCC therapists concern and response to

# 13 Reasons Why

## and the tragedy of teen suicide

*"Hey, it's Hannah. Hannah Baker. Don't adjust your—whatever device you're hearing this on. It's me, live and in stereo. No return engagements. No encore, and this time absolutely no requests. Get a snack, settle in, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended. And if you're listening to this tape, you're one of the reasons why." ~ Quote from 13 Reasons Why Netflix series*

Our professional Christian staff feels compelled to share their thoughts about the wildly popular Netflix series that has initiated so much discussion and controversy, especially after the recent announcement that the series has been renewed for a second season. If you've watched the series, you may be wondering how you feel about it. Most people are "sucked in" and have even binge-watched the series. Most people do feel conflicted. Their gut is telling them something is missing. They are right. The omission of information on the life and death topic of suicide is too important not to voice. We will briefly share below "The Good" and "The Bad" that our professional Christian therapists have expressed about *13 Reasons Why*. Our professional mental health staff is highly disappointed in the release of the series in addition to missing an opportunity to educate our youth about serious mental health issues that may lead to suicide.

### Brief Summary of Series

The series *13 Reasons Why* is based on the book by Jay Asher (2007) and was released as a 13 episode Netflix drama on March 31, 2017. Viewers know that from the beginning the story will not have a happy ending. Seventeen year old Hannah has completed suicide. There are 13 people who have failed her and each episode focuses on how their actions/words were one of 13 reasons why she choose to end her life.

### The Good

- People are talking about and have been made more aware that our youth are regularly dealing with issues that seriously affect mental health, such as bullying and sexual assault.
- The series shines a light on bullying, sexual assault, and the danger of "blaming the victim".
- Viewers are given more insight into the pain a person experiences from bullying or assault.
- Parents are forced to look at the reality of what goes on in their children's high schools.
- Parents are reminded of how important open communication is with their children.

### The Bad

- The series does not talk enough about the serious mental health issues that a suicidal person has. They are sick and need help. They are hurting and have lost hope. Depression and mental illness are the reasons why people complete suicide.
- The series glorifies suicide, i.e. it makes suicide look like a good way to make others see the hurt they have caused you. Hannah doesn't see this at all. She's dead. Adolescents do not always fully understand the finality of death.
- The series targets an age group (teenagers) whose brain is not fully developed. Critical reasoning skills and executive function are not there fully. This leaves too much open to teen interpretation and reasoning about the series, especially if viewed without parental control or input. Teenagers tend to see the here and now as how their life will always be, instead of a season of their life.
- As professional Christian therapists, we noticed there is no hope in this series. There are no alternatives. There is no view or mention of religion, faith, or Christianity at all. No students affiliated with a church, pastor, or youth group. No one who could tell her that her life is valuable and that her deepest wounds could be healed by a loving God. Our staff sees firsthand how the integration of faith and the field of professional psychology work together towards healing and wholeness.
- There were no suicide hotline numbers or resources mentioned before or after each episode. There should be serious warnings before each episode.
- The series seems to normalize suicide or desensitize viewers to suicide as a good way to be heard.

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- The series sadly joins our secular society to further expose and desensitize our young people to underage drinking and premarital sex. It is portrayed as part of typical teenage behavior, adding to the normalizing of it.
- The suicide scene and sexual assault scenes are very graphic. Our therapists affirm the studies that show these graphic scenes may serve as “triggers” for people who have experienced trauma, bringing back flashbacks of their own trauma and/or suicidal thoughts or ideations.
- Therapists who have suicidal clients are concerned that the series shows a detailed example of how to complete suicide. Where to cut your arms, with what type of razor, etc.
- The series’ does not advocate a message to teens who are struggling to get help and that there is another way. The portrayal of the school counselor is fictional. Mental health professionals are portrayed as “uncaring”. School counselors know what to do when a student comes to them with issues. The message to adolescents is “don’t see the school counselor.”
- “Although the intent in creating the series was good, I believe, as a mental health professional, the negative outweighs the positive – the series itself is depressing.”
- Other disturbing scenes, which (maybe not intentionally) contribute to desensitizing and sensationalizing certain topics:
  - The character, Sky, refers to those who commit suicide as cowards and alludes to “cutting” in its place – a teen’s horribly misconstrued point of view.
  - Another character, Tyler, has an arsenal of weapons and doesn’t appear to be in a good state of mind – leaving the topic open for season two, which is a horribly disturbing idea.

### Cautions

Using the series as a springboard into discussion for teenagers, even in a controlled environment, would be difficult at best. Something of this magnitude ought to be done under much supervision and having mental health professionals present. Even being a professional and having worked with suicidal clients – each case is delicate and individual.

### Advice to Parents

We do not recommend that your student watch *13 Reasons Why*, however, if your child is going to or has already watched the series, we encourage parents to watch it with them and discuss their reactions to the issues addressed in the series.

If you are concerned about your child, know that asking your child questions will not make them consider suicide or hurting themselves. Asking the following questions will help you determine if your child needs professional help. The more “yes” or specific answers, the more serious the situation. Children who answer “yes” or have specific answers should not be left alone and should receive professional help.

- Do you have thoughts of hurting or killing yourself?
- If so, do you have a plan?
- If so, do you have the means?
- Have you already done something to hurt yourself?



### Resources

Youth Crisis Line (24/7) 800-843-5200

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24/7) 1-800-273-8255

National Suicide Prevention Online Chat <http://chat.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetHelp/LifelineChat.aspx>

Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio (24/7) 1-888-628-9454

Deaf, Hard of Hearing: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24/7) via TTY: 1-800-799-4889

Hopeline Call or Text (24/7): 1-877-235-4525

Suicide: Myths vs Facts <http://bit.ly/SuicideMythsVsFacts>



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