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Start Talking!

Building a Drug-Free Future

Know! What Your Kids Are

Watching - 13 Reasons Why

If you haven't already received a parent notice from your local school district regarding the Netflix series "13 Reasons Why," let this Know! Parent Tip serve as your alert.

Even if you haven't heard of **13 Reasons Why**, don't assume your pre-teen or teen hasn't, and do approach this as if he/she may have caught some, several or all 13 episodes. The controversy surrounding this show is the subject matter and how it is being addressed, including depression, bullying, emotional abuse, substance abuse, sexual assault and suicide – and the viewing audience – as this series is the latest buzz in middle and high schools across the nation.

This Netflix-exclusive series begins following the suicide of a high school teenager named Hannah. She has left behind 13 pre-recorded cassette tapes, which is meant to be passed around to the 13 people she blames for her death. Among the many concerns expressed by many mental health experts, they say the show conveys the idea that if your voice is not heard in life, it will most certainly be heard in death. By taking her own life and leaving behind her thoughts, Hannah was able to cause her unlucky 13 to experience extreme guilt, shame and fear – exacting the ultimate revenge on those who hurt her.

Parents nationwide have received notices from local school districts warning that suicide has risen to become the second leading cause of death among U.S. teens, and that watching **13 Reasons Why** may increase thoughts of suicide among this most-impressionable age group – specifically for those who may be experiencing issues similar to those portrayed in the show. Schools are also cautioning that suicide is being glamorized in this series and may be viewed as a way out.

In an article published by Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, Behavioral Health Expert John Ackerman, PhD says the show misses the mark when it comes to realistic behavior surrounding suicide. He says it is unrealistic, for a teen especially, to put together an elaborate series of tapes

in the midst of an emotional crisis and that empathy and revenge are rarely the culprits of taking one's life. Ackerman says, "... 13RW suggests Hannah's suicide served its intended purpose. It promotes the idea that something permanent and shocking is the only way to make others understand the depth of one's pain and what others have done to cause it." He says that it was a potentially dangerous decision by writers and producers, in the final episode, to depict Hannah's suicide in such a drawn out and detailed fashion and warns of "suicide contagion;" a phenomenon where there is an increase in suicides after exposure to the suicidal behavior of others.

Suicide is not the only concerning factor of a young viewing audience. There are multiple graphic, physical assaults and sexual assaults that occur among these teens, as well of plenty of alcohol and drug use (on top of bad language). While many teens tragically do experience assault and do engage in substance abuse, your child does not necessarily benefit from seeing it played out in front of them.

13 Reasons Why is not intended for the middle school youth and in most cases, not at all appropriate for this age group. If your high school student is among the viewing audience, your best bet is to watch it yourself and discuss it with your teen. It is however, a great series for parents to watch. The majority of us parents raising teens currently, never had to deal with the pressures and public shaming that takes place on social media (at least not in our adolescence) and therefore may not realize how deeply devastating it can be for a teen. This show also gives adults a glimpse at how poorly some young people treat others and the impact it can have – in case we have forgotten, from our high school days.

This series is definitely getting conversations started and that's a good thing. But the bottom line is that we, as parents, must know what our kids are watching and keep the conversations going.

Suicide Prevention Resources:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) - Immediate help 24/7
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- [Know! The Warning Signs of Suicide](#)
- [Know! To Gain Understanding About Suicide](#)

Sources: [John Ackerman, PhD. Nationwide Children's Hospital: 13 Reasons Why: Should Parents Be Concerned About This Netflix Series? National Suicide Know! is a program of: Prevention Lifeline.](#) [Netflix.Com: 13 Reasons Why](#)

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