

## What Parents, Caregivers and Educators Need to Know About Netflix's '13 Reasons Why' Series

You may have heard of the popular Netflix TV show called '13 Reasons Why' that was released on March 31, 2017. The series follows the fictional story of a teenage girl, named Hannah Baker, who leaves behind 13 mysterious audio recordings on cassette tapes after committing suicide. She addresses each recording to a person who she says played a role in her tragic decision to end her own life. Some of the scenes and content are graphic and disturbing. Research suggests that exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of death, can be a risk factor for youth struggling with mental health concerns. This could result in:

- Young people connecting with and relating to the main character (who is bullied) and having similar thoughts of suicide as a way out or as a way to get attention;
- An increase or escalation of thoughts among youth who are *already* considering suicide; and
- Adverse mental health symptoms (like anxiety and depression) which can be triggered by the graphic scenes, especially for anyone who has had a close friend or family member commit suicide.

Parents and educators are encouraged to watch for warning signs in vulnerable youth, especially anyone who has a history of suicidal ideation such as emotional and social withdrawal, change in normal behaviours like eating, sleeping, school attendance or grades, as well as verbalizing negative feelings, such as hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness.

Common warning signs for suicide include: making suicidal statements (direct or indirect); being preoccupied with death (in conversation, writing or drawing); giving away belongings; changes in personal appearance; withdrawing from friends and family; and having aggressive or hostile behavior. It is extremely important that you **take all threats of suicide seriously** and seek immediate treatment for your child or teenager.

If your child or teenager has seen the show, it provides a valuable opportunity for discussion around the topic of suicide and can be used to educate about how to identify warning signs of depression or suicidal thoughts among their peers. As parents and teachers, you may want to watch an episode so you are aware of the issues and content.

### Strengthening Protective Factors and Reinforcing Resiliency

Children and youth build resiliency by making connections with adults who are good role models and by participating in positive social activities. Protective factors, such as parental monitoring, spending time as a family, positive adult role models (including parents, coaches and mentors), strong social supports and good peer groups/friends all help strengthen resilience in children and youth. These supports lower the likelihood of negative outcomes related to mental health and addiction.

Resiliency is the ability to overcome challenges or “bounce back” from adverse situations. Parents and other adults can help build resiliency by providing: unconditional encouragement and support; setting high but realistic expectations; communicating boundaries consistently and ensuring they’re consistently enforced; and by creating opportunities for children and youth to be involved in decision-making, goal setting, planning and helping others.

The following link provides additional information for educators:

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/13-reasons-why-netflix-series-considerations-for-educators>

For more information about suicide:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=hw29139&#hw29139-sec>

<https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/youthatrisk/>

<https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/updated-expanded-teen-suicide/>

### **Local Resources**

Talk with your Alberta Health Services Addiction and Mental Health School-based Mental Health Consultant or Addictions Counsellor at your school. Referrals can be made by your school administrator or counsellor.

To access your local Addiction and Mental Health Office, call 403-529-3582; 403-529-3500 or walk-in anytime Mondays to Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 7:15 p.m., and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Individual, family and group sessions are available.

If an emergency, please call 911 or visit the Medicine Hat Regional Hospital Emergency Department. Crisis services are also available by calling 403-529-3500 during office hours or by calling Health Link Alberta at 811.

### **Helpful Numbers**

Health Link Alberta: 811 (24/7 access/service)

Distress Centre: 1-800-784-2433

Mental Health Helpline: 1-877-303-2642

Addictions Helpline: 1-866-332-2322

Kid’s Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

## Helpful Websites

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=ty6090&#ty6090-sec> (Warning Signs of Suicide in Children and Teens)

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/amh.aspx> (Get Help section which has tips for parents on how to talk to their teens about a problem)

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/Page14060.aspx> (Promoting Positive Mental Health)

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

[MyHealth.Alberta.ca](http://MyHealth.Alberta.ca)

[Help4Me](#)

[Teenmentalhealth.org/](http://Teenmentalhealth.org/)

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