



13 REASONS WHY ▶

DISCUSSION GUIDE

About the show

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 an honest look

at the issues faced by young people today. The information below is meant to help viewers understand the various issues addressed in *13 Reasons Why*, and to help guide productive conversations around the tough topics that the series raises and how these situations can be addressed if experienced. *13 Reasons Why* seeks to show the importance of empathy for others, even when their struggles aren't obvious, and that everyone matters to many, even when it doesn't feel that way.



Tips for Watching the Show

- Hit pause and talk about an issue during an episode. Talking about the scenes as they take place can help to ease anxiety if someone is confused or concerned about what they see.
- Discuss moments that you think are similar to what you've seen or experienced in your own life as opposed to what might be amplified for dramatic emphasis.
- Think about what might be missing that you might expect to see in the real world, but was not portrayed in the series. For example, how a teacher or school counselor you know may behave differently from those portrayed in the show.
- If there are scenes that feel uncomfortable to watch, it's ok to skip. Similarly, if there is something you see that feels disturbing, talk with someone - a friend, a counselor, a parent or a trusted adult.
- Continue the conversation even after you are done with an episode. If you are a parent or young person concerned about someone you know, listen for prompts from that person that may indicate an interest in discussing the episode in greater detail. Prompts such as, "I was watching *13 Reasons Why* last night" or a discussion about an actor in the show could come in the classroom, at the dinner table, in the car, on the way to sports practice, or during homework time. At that point, you can say "tell me more" or "I am so glad that you are telling/asking me this."



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? For example, what did you learn about what happened to Jessica and sexual assault?
- Does anything you've watched in the series change your perspective on something you've experienced yourself?
- Do you think the adults did anything wrong? What could they have done better?
- 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?



Difficult Topics

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

Depression

It's important to encourage open dialogue about mental health. Mental health challenges are commonplace and often start to affect people when they are teens or during their young adult years.

Depression is the most common mental health illness. It is a serious illness that causes symptoms that can interfere with one's ability to study, work, sleep, eat and enjoy life.

While there's no single way to tell if someone is depressed, you can look for these possible signs:

- Persistent sadness, decreased energy, overwhelming fatigue, feelings of hopelessness or helplessness, feeling trapped or like a burden to others, withdrawing from activities one usually loves, isolating from friends and family, changing appearance in a dramatic fashion, increased drug or alcohol abuse, constant mood shifts, difficulty concentrating, changes in sleeping patterns.

If you think someone you know may be suffering from depression, it's okay to ask how they are feeling or how you can help. You can also encourage them to talk to a parent, a school counselor or to call or text a helpline that will point them to helpful resources and services.



Self-Harm and Suicide

While *13 Reasons Why* portrays a death by suicide, it's important to note that suicide is tragic, but can be prevented. Suicide should never be considered as an option.

There's no single cause for suicide. Suicide most often occurs when stressors and health issues converge to create an experience of hopelessness or despair.

Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide and it is often underdiagnosed or undertreated. Conditions like depression, anxiety and substance abuse, especially when left unaddressed, can increase risk of suicide. However, most people who actively manage their mental health lead fulfilling lives.

Don't be afraid to have a conversation about mental health including self-harm and suicide. It doesn't increase the risk or plant the idea in someone's head, but it is helpful to invite conversations about feelings, thoughts and perspectives.

Peers are often the first to note early signs of mental health issues, and when young people do seek support, they often turn to a peer. Look out for possible warning signs of increased suicide risk:

- Changed or new behavior related to a painful event, loss or major change
- Talking about harming or killing oneself
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness, feeling trapped
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from activities, isolating from family and friends
- Feelings of depression, anxiety, loss of interest, humiliation, rage

It isn't always easy to reach out to someone who may be struggling with mental health, but just having a conversation can make a difference.

If you feel you are at risk or suspect a child, friend or loved one is thinking about suicide, talk to a trusted adult or reach out to a resource such as a hotline or text line to talk to someone who can help.

Bullying

Bullying is repeated aggressive behavior in which one person in a position of power deliberately threatens, abuses or harms another person physically or emotionally.

In *13 Reasons Why*, bullying takes many forms – physical, verbal, cyber and social isolation.

Bullying rarely exists between two people alone, and the bully isn't the only influence.

Various characters in *13 Reasons Why* either contribute to or support bullying behaviors, while others stand up for those being bullied. Understanding the different behaviors people take on when someone is being bullied in these scenes offers viewers a chance to consider how – by playing a different role – bullying can be prevented.

- Those who Assist – they don't start the bullying behavior, but they encourage bullying and occasionally join in.
- Those who Reinforce – they aren't directly involved in the bullying, but they're part of the audience, sometimes laughing or supporting the bullying, giving power and encouragement to the person doing the bullying.
- Those who are Outsiders – they don't encourage the bullying behavior, but they also don't defend whoever is being bullied.



- Those who Defend – they come to the defense of the person being bullied, tell an adult or offer comfort.

Some people may think talking to someone is tattling, but it is important to alert trusted adults - a parent, teacher or school counselor - about issues that may cause harm.

Sexual Assault & Consent

Sexual assault, or unwanted sexual contact, is a recurring theme in *13 Reasons Why*, providing an opportunity to talk about issues related to consent, ongoing harassment and peer pressure.

Some viewers have reported that the show helped them to better recognize sexual assault.

For clarity, sexual assault can include:

- Rape: when a person does not or is unable to physically or mentally consent to sex and is threatened with force.
- Sexual coercion: when someone makes you feel obligated to say yes to a sexual activity by using guilt, pressure, drugs/ alcohol or force.
- Sexual harassment: includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature in the workplace or school setting. It can also occur in public in the form of catcalling, stalking or groping.

Consensual activity is:

- A mutual and voluntary agreement between people to engage in sexual activity.
- Phrases like, “yes,” “that’s ok,” and “I’m comfortable” are all ways of giving consent, but it doesn’t have to be verbal. It’s important to pay attention to physical and non-verbal cues as well - they may indicate a person is ready to go to the next level. Or not.

- Always ask, “Is this ok?” to clarify consent.

Remember that consent to one sexual activity, such as kissing, doesn’t mean that someone has the right to touch further in any way that makes one uncomfortable.

And what consent is not:

- Ignoring no.
- Silence.
- Assuming flirting or kissing means something more.
- Making sexual advances when a person is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Talking a person into a sexual act using fear or violence.





Consent should happen **every** time, and you can change your mind at any point and say, “No.”

If you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual assault, reach out to a trusted adult, or if you are looking for help and want your privacy protected, you can reach out to a helpline such as [RAINN](#).

Drug & Alcohol Abuse

In *13 Reasons Why*, characters experiment and struggle with drug and alcohol abuse. It can be difficult to figure out what to say to someone you see struggling with these issues, but the show may provide the platform to start an open dialogue.

If you are comfortable approaching the person, start the conversation when he or she is sober. Encourage them to open up. Start by saying something like, “It seems like you’ve been having a tough time lately,” or ask if the person can relate to any of the drug and alcohol moments presented in the show.

Be prepared to listen: put down your phone, look them in the eye, and use non-verbal cues like nodding your head to show you are actively engaged in what they are saying.

Let them share their thoughts and feelings, whatever they may be, without interrupting or criticizing.

If the conversation stalls, talk about how some of their actions have made you feel.

Don’t be surprised if they are unwilling to accept help right away. It can take time before a person admits they have a problem.

Be there for their recovery in whatever way you are comfortable with, without judgement.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Some people may feel that asking an adult for help is a breach of trust or tattling, but it’s important to ask for help when a friend is putting him or herself in danger.

If you are struggling with drug or alcohol abuse, or suspect a child, friend or loved one is abusing drugs or alcohol, talk to a trusted adult, a medical professional or reach out to a resource to talk to someone who can help.

Assessing the Threat of Gun Violence

13 Reasons Why depicts teens with access to guns, some of whom show signs that they are considering harming themselves and others.

Some warning signs are easy to spot, while others can be less direct and more difficult to see.

Sample warning signs include:

- Making direct threats, such as discussing plans to use guns against others, or talking about bringing weapons to school.
- Admiring or commenting on other shooters, including comments that condone previous shooters' behaviors or suggesting they could have done better.
- A series of similar, small behaviors that create a pattern, like incorporating guns or shooting into a school assignment and discussing with friends about buying guns. These patterns are indirect warning signs that often go unnoticed or reported.
- Posting messages, photographs or videos online or on social media that depict guns or include threats to hurt others.

What to do if you spot warning signs:

- If you feel that you're in immediate danger, find safety.
- Tell an adult, like a parent, teacher or school counselor.
- Alert the police.
- Most importantly, do not try to handle the situation by yourself.

It's important to take warning signs seriously. Addressing them early on with parents, teachers or the authorities can help with prevention.

