

Discussion Guide for *13 Reasons Why*

As you might be aware, there is a new popular Netflix series titled *13 Reasons Why*, based on a book by Jay Asher released in 2007. Many of the students that we work with are watching this mini-series, and we want to provide insight into the topics that are addressed and community resources.

13 Reasons Why chronicles the story of a high school student who commits suicide. The show explores the 13 reasons why she decides to end her life. There are depictions of bullying, harassment, sexual assault, and rape in the show. Much of the talk around this series has been about suicide prevention. However, it is just as important to address the experiences that the main character identifies as some of the main reasons for her suicide, including rape and sexual assault.

Research tells us that approximately 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18.¹ We know that these issues impact our communities, and this series highlights the need for resources for youth experiencing these issues, and the importance of having open conversations with youth.

If your child is watching this series, it is critical that you create space for your child to process through the issues that are portrayed, and have an open dialogue with your child. Please feel free to utilize the Women's Center as a resource, especially if your child is triggered by the show. We have two 24-hour hotlines available, in addition to certified counselors that specifically work with youth.

Below are some tips on how to have informed and age-appropriate conversations about sexual violence with your child:

- Keep an open line of communication with your child at all times. They might not feel comfortable bringing up these topics themselves, so don't be afraid to start these conversations.
- It is important to name the crimes that are occurring and to not sugar coat or dismiss what truly happened. For example, actually using the terms rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, etc.
 - Sexual Assault- is a broad term to describe when one person forces or manipulates another into unwanted sexual activity/behavior. There are many different behaviors that constitute sexual assault, including:
 - Unwanted sexual touches- touching of genitals, anus, and/or breasts with or without clothes on;
 - Exposure to inappropriate material, pornographic material, flashing;
 - Rape- anal, oral, or vaginal penetration by an object or body part, against someone will and/or where he or she are incapable of giving consent;
 - Sexual Harassment- uninvited and unwelcomed verbal or physical behavior of a sexual or sexist nature.
- Talk to your child about the progression of the behaviors shown in the series. Address how behaviors can escalate over time and how we can intervene at each stage. Ask

questions about who could have intervened at multiple points throughout the series and how they could have intervened. Recognize that intervention should not only happen when a sexual assault is imminent, but we also need to intervene and challenge rape jokes, sexual harassment, sexist language, victim blaming, and other beliefs and ideas that lay the foundation for sexual violence to occur. There are many different bystander intervention techniques that individuals can utilize:

- **Distraction-** Call the victim to ask him/her a question or suggest it's time to go. You can also distract the perpetrator: "Hey man, didn't I see you at..."
 - **Group intervention-** Ask friends to help. There is power in numbers.
 - **Get an authority-** Ask any authority figure to help support the intervention. Adult, parent, teacher, coach, etc.
 - **Challenge the behavior-** Explain that what the perpetrator is doing is unacceptable: "It's not okay to keep harassing her. She's made it clear she isn't interested." "Cut it out. It's not okay."
 - **Ask questions-** Encourage the perpetrator to think about his/her motivation and actions: "Why are you acting this way? What's your goal here?"
 - **Appeal to their best self-** Communicate that you respect them and know he/she is capable of making the right decision: "You're better than this. You know the right thing to do."
 - **Look out for a friend-** "We're friends, right? You know how much trouble you could get in and how much hurt you could cause? I know you're better than this."
 - **Make it personal-** "How would you feel if someone treated your mom/sister/brother/girlfriend/boyfriend that way?"
 - **Separation-** Use this strategy with either of the people involved: "I need to talk to you about something," or "Let's get something to eat."
- Have a conversation with your child about what consent really looks like:
 - If someone is unconscious or asleep, they cannot give consent;
 - If someone is incapacitated due to alcohol or other drugs, they cannot give consent;
 - The absence of a "no" does not give consent;
 - Silence or submission does not give consent;
 - Consent is freely given, enthusiastic, current in that moment, and can be revoked at any time.
 - Use media and pop culture as teachable moments. When you hear a song or see a television show or movie that minimizes sexual assault, makes fun of victims, or glorifies unhealthy relationships, ask your child to critically think about the messages they are being sent:
 - Is this relationship healthy? What about their relationship do you like? Is equality, respect, and empathy present?
 - Does this minimize, dehumanize, or objectify females or other populations?
 - Does this promote violence?
 - Is consent present in this scenario?
 - Does this seem realistic? Could this happen to someone in your school?
 - Recognize and look out for warning signs of sexual assault, including: withdrawing from activities they once enjoyed, alcohol or drug abuse, self-harm, depression, anxiety, risky sexual behavior, changes in eating or sleeping patterns, changes in dress or appearance, and sexual knowledge or comments that are inappropriate for their age. This is not an

exhaustive list, and these behaviors do not automatically guarantee that your child has experienced sexual violence.

- No one asks to be sexually assaulted. No matter what a victim is wearing, drinking, or how they are behaving, they do not deserve to be sexually assaulted. We need to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, instead of blaming victims.
- Every survivor will respond differently to an assault. Survivors can have a wide range of emotions: anger, shame, guilt, embarrassment, denial, sadness, etc. Some people want to talk about it, some people don't. There is no right or wrong way to respond. Survivors have options and they get to decide what is best for them. Survivors do not have to report to the police, and justice will look different for every survivor.
- Understand secondary trauma. Even individuals who have not been directly victimized can be affected by the experience through hearing about it. These individuals deserve support too.

When the main character sought help from a counselor, she felt unsupported and dismissed. At the Women's Center, we always believe survivors. We are here for support and help. We will always listen.

If you, your child, or someone you know is in need of help, please reach out. All of our services are free and confidential. We serve men, women, and children in 13 towns in our catchment area, including: Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, and Washington.

The Women's Center is here to talk about it.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2005). *Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: Data and Statistics*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/prevalence.htm>

¹ "Child Sexual Abuse: What Parents Should Know." American Psychological Association. (<http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/child-sexual-abuse.aspx>) (February 19 2014)