

New Toolkit Helps With Resources and Guidance For “13 Reasons Why” Season 2

With the release of Season 2 of the popular Netflix series on May 18, 2018, 75 leading mental health, education, suicide prevention, and healthcare experts collaborated on a comprehensive resource called the *13 Reasons Why Toolkit*. The toolkit, published by SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education) was developed in response to these concerns. The toolkit is in the form of a website, with the "Guidance" sections also available in a downloadable PDF format. The toolkit provides specific guidance for parents, educators, youth, clinicians, and media. For example, the "Guidance for Parents" section covers talking with your child about suicide, school shootings, bullying, substance abuse, sexual violence, and what to do if you're worried your child may be suicidal, along with resource links.

As with the virally popular first season, the second season deals with mature themes, including sexual assault, suicide, alcohol and substance abuse, bullying, and extreme violence. The intense, graphic portrayal of difficult issues involving youth present both the risk of triggering harmful behaviors among some vulnerable youth and the opportunity for adults to engage in meaningful and supportive discussions with youth about these issues. It is important that parents, caregivers, educators, and other adults working with children and youth are aware of the potential impact and are prepared to respond appropriately.

The toolkit provides comprehensive, specific information regarding the issues portrayed and guidance for engaging and supporting youth. In general, all adults should consider the following guidance:

1. We strongly recommend that vulnerable children and youth (such as those struggling with depression, previous suicidal behavior, or trauma) not watch this series, and most certainly not watch alone. The same is true for the first season, which some youth are watching or rewatching in preparation for the second season. Netflix has created additional safeguards for both seasons (warning cards, discussion guides, and helping resources), but **these are not a substitute for adult support and engagement.**
2. **We encourage parents to watch the series with their children.** The difficult issues portrayed by the series do occur in schools and communities, and it is important for adults to listen, take adolescents' concerns seriously, and be willing to offer support. We also caution against binge watching, as doing so with intense content, particularly in isolation, can be associated with increased mental health concerns.
3. **Reinforce help-seeking behavior and that adults care and are available for support and guidance.** The adult characters in the series again are portrayed as either incompetent or uncaring. It is vital to counter this false narrative with clear messages that parents are available for discussion and support, and regarding school staff connecting with students, creating a trusting school

climate, and the accessibility and of and behavioral norms for school mental health professionals.

4. **Reinforce that suicide deaths are permanent.** The continued presence of Hannah in season 2 (even in flashback and imaginary mode) continues to give the impression that somehow she is present or able to participate in the experiences of the other characters after her death. It is important to reinforce to students that suicide is never a solution. It is an irreversible choice regarding problems for which there is help. If students are struggling with thoughts of suicide or know someone who is, help them talk to a trusted adult. Adults and students should know risk factors and warning signs of suicide risk. **Always take warning signs seriously, and never promise to keep them secret.** See Save a Friend: Tips for Teens to Prevent Suicide, Communicating With Potentially Suicidal Students, and Safe Messaging for Students for additional information.
5. **Schools should establish and share with parents/caregivers their general plans for supporting affected students.** This can include steps such as linking to this toolkit on the school website, providing staff with guidance on talking to students about the issues portrayed, doing an assessment of risk factors in the school environment, and proactively encouraging students to share ideas and concerns. Schools can use or adapt this sample letter to families to share information.
6. **Schools should consider plans to provide support or information over the summer.** The series is being released toward the end of the school year, and many students may watch after school is out. Capacity over the summer will vary from district to district, but consider e-communications with parents and students, social media, and the school website to continue to raise awareness about resources and the importance of help-seeking and adult involvement. Also reach out to local youth organizations and summer programs to share relevant information.
7. **Reinforce resiliency for all students.** Resiliency gives students the ability to deal with challenges and adapt to new or difficult circumstances in a positive, productive manner. The positive influence that even one caring adult can have in helping youth overcome challenges has been documented by decades of careful study. Resilience can be built through trusting relationships, linking youth with positive role models, and offering encouragement and reassurance. Engaging in open and supportive conversations with youth about the issues in the series can contribute to this important sense of trust and connectedness. In addition, adults can help to empower youth to increase confidence in their own personal strengths and abilities, effectively manage strong feelings and impulses, and effectively solve problems. For more guidance on promoting resiliency and coping in youth, see Resiliency Building in Youth.