



youth service bureau

Parents' Guide to *13 Reasons Why* Season 2

Rochelle Kruszka, M.A., LMFT
Youth & Family Therapist

13 Reasons Why, the controversial Netflix series, released its second season on Friday, May 18, 2018. This series continues to focus on suicide, sexual assault, and bullying as shown in season one. Season two builds on these topics and also includes other difficult subjects like substance use/abuse and gun violence. If you haven't seen it, be sure to check out [YSB's Parent Guide](#) to season one.

Why should parents be concerned?

According to a [study](#) by the Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine, following season one, internet searches related to suicide increased about 19% above expectation in the 19 days following the release of the series. More specifically, there was a 26% increase in searches for "how to commit suicide." While this does not mean that there was an actual increase in attempts, research trends have been shown to be correlated with actual suicides or attempts.

Netflix has attempted to respond to the criticisms from parents and mental health professionals by taking a number of steps this season. Before watching the series, there is an introduction by a few of the actors playing characters in the show. The actors encourage viewers to consider whether they struggle with some of these issues, and if so, "this series may not be right for you." Following each episode, during the credits, there is a voiceover encouraging anyone who may need it to find resources at their website: 13reasonswhy.info. The website lists resources for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) and the Crisis Text Line (741741). There are also weblinks for online resources for various topics including suicide prevention, gun violence, bullying, and substance use.

The creators of the show have stated that one of the main goals of the show is to "start a conversation" about some of these topics. The way that some of these topics are introduced or addressed on the show makes it difficult to believe that this is really their goal due to the gratuitous nature of how these topics are depicted. Many times, the series shows exactly what NOT to do. Netflix has put out a [discussion guide](#) for use when watching the series, which can help to guide the conversations that parents are having with their kids. However, most of the middle and high school students that I see do not watch the show with their parents. In fact, many of the parents have no idea their child is watching this show or what it is.

What to watch out for in season two:

Suicide. Season two focuses on the parents' civil case against the school district following the suicide of Hannah Baker. This season also focuses on how the other students are coping after Hannah's death. There is no graphic suicide in season two, which is a relief to parents and mental health professionals. The series does show the long-lasting impacts that one individual's choice to die by suicide has on others. It also shows the long-lasting impacts (both mental and physical) that can occur after another character's suicide attempt. However, this scenario, as depicted in this show, is

extremely unlikely as this character survived a gunshot wound to the head with minor physical and cognitive repercussions.

Living on after suicide. In season one, Hannah continues to “live on” through her cassette tapes left for those whom she blamed for her suicide. In season two, Hannah “lives on” through the main character, Clay’s, visual and auditory hallucinations. He interacts with Hannah as if she is still alive. This gives young viewers the false perception that suicide is not permanent.

Blame. One of the main areas of focus in season two is blame. In season one, Hannah blames 13 people as her “reasons” for choosing suicide. In season two, her parents want to blame the school district, the bullies at school, and Hannah’s sexual assault perpetrator. The students point fingers at each other and blame one another. Ultimately, Hannah made a choice to end her own life, and this is something that is acknowledged only by the “bad guys” (the school district, the principal) and made to seem cruel.

Sexual assault. There are two graphic sexual assaults shown in season one. In season two, there are multiple flashbacks to the scenes from season one as well as multiple graphic descriptions of the assaults. There are many other sexual assaults shown through photos or discussed. There is also an extremely graphic sexual assault scene in the last episode of season two in which a male student is sexually assaulted by multiple other students using a mop handle. This scene is, once again, unnecessarily graphic and very disturbing to watch. While this does demonstrate that sexual assaults do not only happen to females and are often more about power and violence than sexual gratification, the way this scene is portrayed is gratuitously sensational.

Substance use. Substance use was featured much more heavily in season two than in season one. Season two features multiple substances including alcohol, marijuana, “molly,” steroids, and heroin. The methods of use were also explicitly shown including smoking heroin from foil and intravenous injection in multiple body parts. These scenes normalize substance use and could be considered a how-to manual for kids learning how to use some of these drugs.

Bullying. Season one focused a significant amount on bullying, and season two goes into more detail about how bullying tends to happen in schools (i.e., on social media, face-to-face, indirect). Bullying involves an imbalance of power, and this season shows that the athletes at this school were “untouchable” in many ways. This is a common theme that is portrayed in the media and that I hear from the youth I work with as well. In the show, the baseball coach halfheartedly attempts a lesson on consent, but it is clear that he is only doing this because it is required. The baseball team is referred to many times as “a family,” and the understanding is that family does not turn on one another. Everyone is participating in a “code of silence.”

Gun violence. This is a new controversial topic in the show that was not addressed last season. Season two features multiple students using guns as a way to work through anger and other emotions. Most scenes involve youth using weapons unbeknownst to their parents. Clearly, these weapons were either not locked up or not locked up well enough. In two of the episodes, students threaten other students by pointing a gun at them. In the final episode of season two, a student brings multiple guns and weapons to school intending to kill his classmates. The active shooter situation is completely mishandled in season two and models for viewers that they should approach an active shooter to talk and not to involve authorities.

Not telling adults/authorities. This is one of the most concerning elements of the whole series. Episode after episode shows students being overwhelmed by circumstances in their lives and refusing to talk to parents, trusted adults, or authorities about it. There are multiple events in the show that model for youth watching that keeping secrets is “normal,” and it’s up to the youth to handle

situations that come their way. This is very harmful and counter-productive messaging.

Lack of positive supports/coping: This show misses a prime opportunity to show at least some of these characters using positive supports or coping skills to overcome adverse circumstances. In fact, in the scene in which the male student is being sexually assaulted, he attempts to use his newfound coping and communication skills to thwart his peers, however, he is sexually assaulted anyway. This is yet another example of counter-productive mixed messaging for our vulnerable youth.

What parents can do:

Set Parental Controls and/or “PIN protection” on your Netflix account. Parents have been able to set Parental Controls for content containing certain maturity levels for quite some time (i.e., needing a PIN number to access anything TV-14 or above). In March 2018, Netflix rolled out a feature that allows parents to select specific titles to block playback without a PIN number regardless of other Parental Control settings.

Assess whether your child is ready for a show like this. It continues to be rated TV-MA, meaning mature audiences only. Take into consideration your child’s age and mental health status. If you have decided your child is ready for this show, watch WITH your child. YSB recommends SAVE’s 13 Reasons Why Toolkit (see link below) as the preferred discussion guide when watching the series. Pause the show as you watch together and talk about the issues the series brings up.

If your child has already watched season two, ***make time to talk with them about the show.*** Some good opportunities could include: at the dinner table, on a car trip, or at bedtime. Your child is more likely to be open to a conversation if it’s not confrontational and you catch them at a time when they are relaxed. Ask open-ended questions or have a discussion about what their friends may be saying about the show. Sometimes it’s easier for kids to talk about what their friends think or say, because it feels safer to them.

Helpful resources:

***The SAVE Foundation’s 13 Reasons Why Toolkit** – This is a great, comprehensive resource for parents created by a team of mental health, suicide prevention, education, and healthcare experts.

The JED Foundation’s [13 Reasons Why Season 2: Recommendations and Resources](#)

Common Sense Media’s [10 conversations to Have with Your Teens Following “13 Reasons Why” \(Season 2\)](#)

As always, if you have individual concerns about your child related to mental health, or need additional resources, please contact Youth Service Bureau. We will help your family to navigate these challenges.

Youth Service Bureau’s mission is to help youth and families learn the skills they need to be more successful at home, in school and throughout their community. YSB provides Youth-Focused Family Counseling, Diversion and School-Based Services (including mental and chemical health, and crisis response services), and Youth & Family Education.

Cottage Grove 651-458-5224 | Stillwater 651-439-8800 | Woodbury 651-735-9534

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