



13 Reasons Why Season 2: An opportunity to engage in vital conversations related to suicide and violence prevention.

A second season of the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* began on May 18, 2018. The first season of the show focused on Hannah Baker; an adolescent girl who killed herself and left behind a series of audio recordings that explain reasons why she committed suicide. Based on a bestselling book by Jay Asher, the show garnered significant media attention related to the way the series portrays trauma in the forms of sexual assault, bullying, verbal emotional and physical abuse. The newest season further explores the aftermath of Hannah Baker's suicide but includes additional content on related issues such as substance abuse, gun violence in schools and rape culture. Interviews with Jay Asher and the series producers suggested that their intent for the series was to be a catalyst for educators and community leaders to engage adolescents in dialogue on the serious topics of suicide, bullying and sexual violence as a means of prevention. Once again, this new season has raised concerns from teachers, mental health professionals, and practitioners across the country regarding the graphic content and romanticizing of suicide in *13 Reasons Why*.

The new season has again raised concerns from teachers, mental health professionals, and practitioners across the country about the graphic content and romanticizing of suicide in the show. In response to concerns, the producers and creators of this series have attempted to provide guidance related to the sensitive and graphic nature of how issues like suicide, bullying, sexual assault, substance abuse and gun violence in schools are depicted in the new series. Executive Producer Selena Gomez added a warning at the start of each episode that cautions viewers about the graphic nature of the series. A video message titled *13 Reasons Why: Beyond the Reasons* created by the production staff and cast members was added along with a discussion guide for educators and parents. Despite these efforts, the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) remains alarmed about how this series could trigger acts of self-harm or harm to others.

SSWAA created *13 Reasons Why: Support for Educators and Families*, a position statement in response to the first season. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults aged 10 to 24. Our goal was to provide valuable insight and research based tools to effectively prevent and intervene when a student may exhibit warning signs of self-harm or harm towards others. According to a recent study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts have increased steadily from 2008 to 2015 (Plemmons, et al., 2018; Shain, 2016). The findings indicated increased numbers across all age groups with well-established seasonal patterns. Astor, Benbenishty, & Marachi, (2010) reported that violence, injury and unaddressed student mental health concerns are barriers to learning and adversely affect the wellbeing of students and school personnel across the United States.

As mental health professionals, we know that positive learning environments cannot occur when students, families, staff and administration are profoundly impacted by violence and unmet mental health needs. SSWAA supports access to resources and professional development for school staff on ways to effectively intervene and prevent tragedies. An international coalition of mental health, education, and suicide prevention professionals shares SSWAA's concerns. Dan Reidenberg, Psy.D.,

Executive Director of Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) and leader of the coalition issued an alert regarding the second season of the *13 Reasons Why*. The statement cautioned the public about the troubling content in season 2 in hopes of preparing them to dialogue with youth who want to talk about the issues in the series and those adolescents who struggle with the content. The American Psychiatric Association also shares similar concerns regarding the potential negative impact the series could have on some youth (American Psychiatric Association, 2018)

SSWAA created a list of resources and avenues of support in response to the first installment of *13 Reasons Why*. The resources can be used by school social workers, families and educators to prepare young adults if they plan to watch the series. One of the resources, *The 13 Reasons Why Toolkit*, is a comprehensive guide published by SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education). It was developed by 75 leading mental health, education, suicide prevention, and healthcare experts and provides specific strategies for parents, educators, youth, clinicians, and media on how to discuss suicide, school shootings, bullying, substance abuse, and sexual violence. The resource also includes guidelines on what to do if a child or young adult exhibits suicide-warning signs (Grobman, 2018).

Although there are many adults in schools who can provide mental health support to students, **school social workers** are well-positioned to spearhead identification, training, and implementation of evidence-based educational, behavioral, and mental health services in schools as well as in partnerships with community agencies. Utilizing a multi-tiered system of support where school social workers collaborate with other school employed mental health providers as well as outside culturally responsive supports to holistically meet the needs of students is best practice in violence prevention and the creation of safe and supportive school environments.

SSWAA's mission is to empower school social workers and promote the profession of school social work to enhance the social and emotional growth and academic outcomes of all students. One way to accomplish this mission is through our commitment to provide evidence based resources to support our practice as well as research informed techniques for parents, teachers and administrators to effectively intervene when issues arise.

What steps can you take to increase awareness of this series and to provide support to students, families and staff?

1. For vulnerable students who may be sensitive to the issues addressed in this series, encourage families to make an informed decision about whether or not to watch, monitor and engage in conversations about topics presented.
2. SSWAA encourages our members, educators and families to review the SSWAA Position Statement titled *13 Reasons Why: Support for Educators and Families* for resources and support.
3. Familiarize yourself with the resources available on a newly created section of the SSWAA website entitled **School Violence Resources including a series of webinars focused on school violence prevention**. Go to www.sswaa.org and click on the "Resources" Tab under Professional Resources.
4. Alert school administrators and alert families and staff about the 2nd Season of *13 Reasons Why* and make them aware of available resources.
5. Seize the opportunity to raise awareness about suicide, school violence, and sexual assault by thoughtfully dialoguing with students during classroom visits, individual or group sessions.
6. SSWAA encourages our members to embrace their leadership and mental health expertise by providing essential professional development in the areas of suicide prevention, early warning

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signs of childhood mental illness, the impact of trauma on overall development and academic achievement, etc. to school staff and administrators.

7. We also support training school staff and students on ways to prevent and address bullying to sustain bullying prevention efforts over time.
8. Inform students of safe people and places they can go to dialogue about intense or overwhelming emotions.
9. For further support in designing and implementing strategies to prevent suicide and to promote social, emotional and behavioral health, SAMHSA has created a free resource: [Prevention Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools](#) or the [SAVE 13 Reasons Why Toolkit](#).

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