International
School Counselor Association

aaie

Webinar: Responding to "13 Reasons Why", Recommendations for International School Counselors with Dr. Poland

May 10th, 2017

Netflix's 13 Reasons Why: Recommendations for Schools and Parents

Dr. Scott Poland
Co-Director Suicide and Violence Prevention
Nova Southeastern University

Goals of the Webinar

- Provide an overview of the scope of youth suicide with recommendations for schools.
- Emphasize prevention and the importance of mental health treatment.
- Discuss the specific criticisms of the program from mental health experts.
- Provide specific recommendations about who should view the program and how to discuss suicide with youth.

Netflix's Most Popular Program

- It's based on a book by Jay Asher and focuses on a fictional character 17 year-old Hannah Baker who died by suicide.
- Hannah, who has been the victim of bullying and rape, leaves behind a series of 13 tapes blaming others for her death.
- The compelling program presents as a mystery with dark themes and graphic images of rape and suicide.

Comments of Observers;

- “I am a school counselor and loved the show.”
- “Mom, I know the show is not real as my school is not like that.”
- “Kids as young as 8 are watching it!”
- “When I watched Hannah in the show, I thought this is what I want to do.”
- “They are calling kids ‘Hannah Baker’!”
- “Should I have watched it with my 12 year old son?”
- “ The book may have tipped my daughter to making a suicide attempt.”

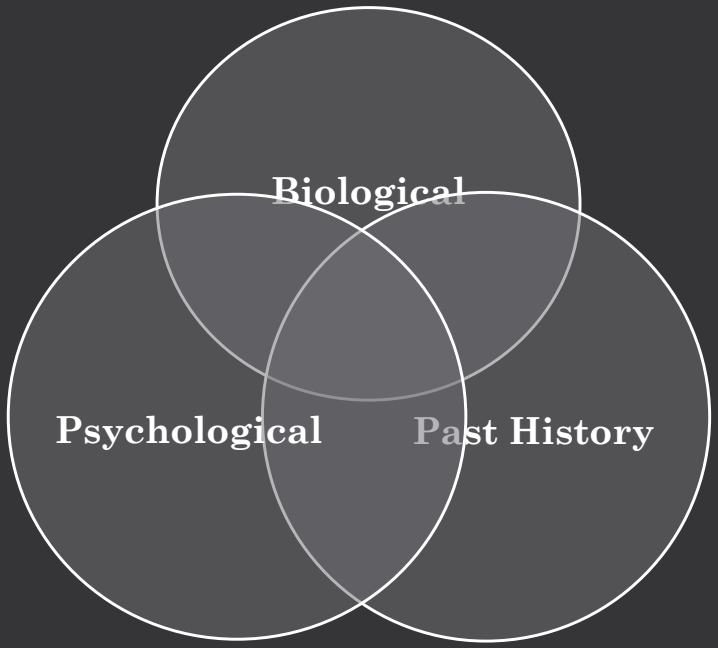
Criticisms of 13 Reasons Why ;

- The graphic scenes of Hannah's suicide violate all known media guidelines.
- The program ignored the topics of mental illness and suicide contagion and will very likely increase suicides.
- Teens were depicted as leading secret lives that adults were unaware of and teens were not portrayed as going to adults for help.

Criticisms;

- The program blurred the lines between life and death with Hannah appearing in many scenes after her death.
- No information was provided about Hannah's past history before starting at her new school.
- The memorialization at school did not follow Best Practices.

Individual Factors



Current Issues/ Precipitating Events

Key Points;

- Youth suicide is a leading cause of death worldwide.
- It is the second leading cause of deaths for teens in the U.S. and many other countries.
- The suicide rate for middle school girls has increased dramatically in the U.S.
- Most schools have been reluctant to address youth suicide and unsure how to do so.

Key Points;

- Teens are the most susceptible to suicide contagion.
- No one person or no one thing is to blame for a suicide.
- Suicide is almost always the result of untreated or undertreated mental illness.
- Many teens struggle with depression and most do not receive treatment.
- There are evidence based treatments for mental illnesses.

Key Points

- Suicide rarely occurs without warning signs.
- Suicide is not inherited or destined.
- Talking about suicide will not plant the idea.
- Teens must go to adults for help and school counselors and psychologists are trained in suicide assessment.
- Universal screening for depression is recommended in schools and physician's offices.

SPRC Brief ; Suicide and Bullying

- A strong association exists between bullying and suicide but thankfully the vast majority of bullying victims do not attempt or die by suicide.

- It is difficult to rule out other risk factors such as mental illness, substance abuse, trauma, loss, and physical or sexual abuse to determine if being bullied caused a suicide.

- www.sprc.org

Warning Signs of Suicide; Did Hannah Display Any?

- Suicide notes and threats– Not given to anyone
- Symptomatic clues-- Yes
- Giving away prized possessions/making a will--No
- Fascination with death--No
- Exposure to suicide--No
- Self-injury (NSSI)--No

Mr. Porter the Counselor in 13 Reasons Why;

- He failed to establish rapport and he should have moved from behind his desk.
- He needed to ask direct questions about thoughts of hopelessness, giving up and suicide.
- Hannah's parents needed to be notified based on her statement about being raped.
- He was dismissive and it was inappropriate to just tell her she needed to move on.

What Should Schools Do?

- Be proactive and advise parents of the dangers of the program and specify that vulnerable youth regardless of their age should not watch it.
- Encourage adults whose children watch the program to watch it with them and provide opportunities for discussion about it.
- Ensure that no segments of 13 Reasons Why are shown in K-12 classrooms.

What Should Schools Do in Classrooms?

- Carefully plan curriculum units about youth suicide prevention.
- Provide teachers with talking points to use when the program comes up; the importance of mental health treatment, going to adults for help, Hannah had alternatives to suicide, no one is at fault for her death, and bullying alone does not cause suicide.
- Ask students to identify what they could do if they or a friend are ever suicidal.

What Should Parents Do?

- Common Sense Media recommends (www.commonsensemedia.org) that no one under 16 view the show.
- If your child over 16 is vulnerable to depression and anxiety do not allow them to watch the show.
- Watch with your 16+ year old and provide opportunities for discussion after each episode and avoid binge watching.
- Review recommendations at https://www.save.org/13-reasons-why/

Unique Challenges for International Schools

- Mental health providers in the area change frequently as they may be on one or two year contracts.
- Recommendation: know the current mental health resources in the area including crisis hotline services, current private practitioners and any services provided by the government
- Cultural diversity is a challenge as counselors are working with students from varied backgrounds, culture and religious beliefs.
- Recommendation: Meet with the school team to plan mental health conversations and interventions with regards to the cultural diversity

Best Practices for Schools

- Schools are encouraged to form a suicide prevention task force and to develop policies and to carefully plan curriculum units for students.
- Schools need to have bullying and suicide prevention programs.
- School personnel should not hesitate to ask a student known to be a bullying victim about thoughts of hopelessness and suicide.

Best Practices for Schools

- Awareness training conducted annually on suicide warning signs for all staff.
- Suicide lethality assessment training for key staff.
- Parent notification including a signed emergency notification form and a release of information.
- Know the best community service providers for suicide assessment and management.
- Provide a re-entry program for students returning from hospitalization.
- Provide information on the school website about depression and suicide.

Best Practices for Schools

- Implement depression screening programs such as, SOS Signs of Suicide, SPRC, Best Practices Registry 1. It is evidenced based and information is available at www.mentalhealthscreening.org
- SOS has a middle school and high school program with two components; a screening form and videos with the motto Acknowledge, Care, Tell.
- Be familiar with and implement the legislative requirements for suicide prevention in schools.

Final Thoughts

- The program and the Beyond 13 discussions of suicide were off the mark and diminished Netflix's efforts to start the conversation about suicide.
- Suicide is never someone else's fault.
- The program concludes with Clay talking about the need for everyone to be kind to others—this is admirable but ignores the role of mental illness in suicide.
- Suicide is preventable.

Suicide Prevention is Everyone's Responsibility

- Free videos on awareness, assessment, postvention and self-injury www.nova.edu/suicideprevention
- Suicide in schools by Erbacher, Singer & Poland (2015) Routledge
- spoland@nova.edu

Suicide Prevention Resources

American Association of Suicidology

www.suicidology.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

www.afsp.org

Kognito

www.kognito.com

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide

www.sptusa.org

Suicide Awareness Voices in Education

www.save.org

The International School Counseling Association, provides leadership and advocacy for the profession of school counseling in international schools. We provide resources, professional development, and a collaborative network benefiting student success in our global community.

Join us.

www.iscainfo.com

International
School Counselor Association

ISCA Annual Conference
March 1-3, 2018
Bangkok, Thailand

www.iscainfo.com

SUMMER INSTITUTES

https://www.aaie.org/events/summer-leadership-institutes