

Tips for Talking To Your Teen About “13 Reasons Why”

At this point, if you're a parent of a teen you've likely heard the buzz around the new Netflix series, 13 Reasons Why (13RW). 13RW revolves around a high school student who takes her life after experiencing a series of troubling and traumatic events. Although the topics covered in 13RW are authentic and uncensored accounts of what happens in many high schools, its depiction of suicide is glamorized, sensational and lacking important information about what to do if you are concerned for yourself or someone in your life. Research shows this type of suicide messaging can even be harmful to vulnerable youth. Many parents have started to ask, what can they can do and how they can start conversations with their teens about the content of the show. Below is a basic framework for talking with your teen about suicide.

1. **Start talking.** Let's face it. Talking to your teen about suicide can be scary. Often we worry we may even be “planting the idea in their head”. Fortunately, the belief that talking about suicide leads to the behavior has been studied and debunked. What we know is that the more healthy and open discussion, the better.
2. **Ask what they already know.** When you ask your teen what they already know about suicide it ensures that you will start a conversation at an appropriate level, rather than assuming they know what they don't or annoying them with information they already have.
3. **Personalize the conversation.** In this first conversation, make sure to turn the topic to your teen. Ask how they are doing. If you think they may be depressed or suicidal, ask. Teens respect being spoken to directly and like adults. Also, if appropriate, telling an older teen that you'd be devastated if they died by suicide, is a loving and healthy message to share.
4. **Just listen.** Asking your teen questions and listening to the answers will create the space needed for them to express themselves. Believe it or not, teens often don't want our advice, they just want our time and attention and to know that what they say matters to us.
5. **Validate their feelings.** Whatever your teen says, whether you agree with them or not, validate the feeling behind it. Feelings can't be wrong and having someone hold space for you to speak your truth and validate it is powerful and will lead to healthier, deeper conversations in the future.
6. **Emphasize help seeking.** No matter what, always talk to your teen about the importance of seeking help if and when they need it and where to go. There are lots of places to seek support at school, at places of worship and in our communities. For more information about where to find help in your community, visit our website: erikaslighthouse.org/treat-depression. If you are worried about your child's immediate safety, take them to the emergency room or call 911. For more information on teen depression and navigating treatment, download our Parent Handbook on Childhood and Teen Depression: erikaslighthouse.org/the-parent-handbook-on-childhood-and-teen-depression-1.

Other Helpful Resources on 13RW

1. [A mental health professionals take on 13RW](#)
2. [Great for addressing the myths and facts of suicide related to 13RW](#)
3. [Great general guidelines for schools in addressing 13RW](#)
4. [Great for classroom discussion on help seeking and school climate related to 13RW](#)