

Guidance For Media

Netflix released the second season of the controversial series 13 Reasons Why on Friday, May 18th, 2018. The media section of the 13 Reasons Why Toolkit was developed by an international coalition of mental health experts with the intention to review the scientific literature as it pertains to the series, as well as, provide practical advice and resources to help media respond appropriately.

General recommendations for reporters and media:

When reporting on a major news story that contains sensitive and often complex topics such as those portrayed in 13 Reasons Why, it is important to follow best practices to reduce the risk of contagion (copy-cat) incidents, promote help-seeking behaviors and increase awareness among the public.

1 Avoid sensationalizing already heightened topics such as suicide and violence.

- When some topics are sensationalized, glorified, or even romanticized the impacts can be severe for some, especially those who are vulnerable. With that said, it is best to be thoughtful and careful in the language and images that are included in media reporting.
- Using words like "epidemic," "skyrocketing," or "deadliest attack," are not helpful and increase fear and risk of contagion.

2 Always include quality assured resources for your audience. It's recommended to limit the number of resources to avoid overwhelming your more vulnerable audiences, but to always include both a phone number and link to a website if applicable. Supports are vital to facilitate help seeking among vulnerable people.

- Include a national hotline, general support line or a texting service if available in your area.
- Include a website for a local crisis center or counseling center.
- Include in your report a statement that anyone in an urgent crisis should seek help as soon as possible through a hospital or healthcare professional.

3 When using data, make sure it is current and accurate.

- Find reputable sources such as national, state or local health departments to provide you with the most current data. Misinformation can have a harmful and distressing effect on communities.
- Provide comparison data to help the audience put the topics you are reporting on in perspective. For example, "In Apple County, the number of suicides is 3 times higher than the number of homicides."
- Remember that the general public often has a difficult time understanding "rates" vs. numbers. For example, "The rate of suicide in Steele County is 13.2/100,000" as opposed to "In 2016, there were 212 suicides in Steele County."

4 Provide factual information rather than speculation.

- Speculating as to how or why someone engaged in a behavior can create rumors and lead to misunderstanding about the issues you are reporting on. Therefore, reporting on the facts that are known and verified is important safe messaging.
- The topics addressed in the Netflix series 13 Reasons Why are complicated and multi-faceted, so make sure to say that "suicide is complex" or "there are always multiple reasons behind every suicide or act of violence." Avoid simple explanations for these events (e.g., "suicide due to breakup", suicide because of financial troubles").

Recommendations for reporting on themes and topics discussed in 13 Reasons Why:

Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide

1. Know that there are over 100 studies from around the world that have demonstrated how media reporting on suicide can impact the occurrence of additional suicides.
2. Use care when reporting on an individual, even if that is a character in a television show, and instead, help the audience understand the broader issue of suicide and how it impacts the family, community, and society.
3. Always include a message of hope and recovery and provide an alternative outcome than suicide. Stories of someone overcoming a suicidal crisis or someone who has successfully managed their mental health issues are important stories to convey in all reporting on suicide.
4. Ensure you present a balanced picture of the person who died by or attempted suicide. In doing this you will avoid having vulnerable or at risk others only hearing about part of their life and not the struggles/challenges they lived through. At the same time, try and limit how many details about the person who died/attempted in your report so that vulnerable members of your audience do not over-identify with the person who died and believe that will be their outcome as well. Also, do not disclose any details on the suicide method in order to prevent copycat behavior.
5. Updated guidelines for reporting on suicide can be found here: <http://reportingonsuicide.org/> or http://www.who.int/mental_health/suicide-prevention/resource_booklet_2017/en/

Recommendations for Reporting on Mass Shooting/Violence

1. Know that research has demonstrated that a contagion effect applies to reporting on mass shootings and other forms of violence.
 - There is, for example, research that has found mass shooters have copied and tried to out-do prior mass shooters that they never met, but heard about through media reporting on highly sensationalized incidents of violence against others. Therefore, do not report "the deadliest attack on a school since Columbine" but rather "there was another tragic incident of school violence..."
 - Minimize the reporting of the perpetrator. The less information shared the better, as other future perpetrators will try and identify with the prior attacker and can be inspired by them or how they are portrayed by the media.
 - Avoid reporting (and repetitively reporting) on the details of the method(s) used in the violence.



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2. **The majority of people who have and live with a mental health condition are non-violent. They have never been violent and are unlikely to ever become violent. While a very small percentage of those who are mentally ill act violently, the majority do not. It is also true that a number of those individuals who are violent also suffer from a mental illness, but the two are not mutually exclusive.**
 - This is an opportunity to report on the difference between reporting on a crime (e.g. mass shooting) and on a public health issue (e.g. suicide).
 - Generalizing and stigmatizing mental illness or drawing misguided conclusions and connections between violence and mental illness is not helpful to the public and should be avoided. Responsible and accurate reporting on violence helps educate the public, reduces risk of copycat incidents, and helps increase the possibility that others might seek help for their mental health issues. However, when reporting automatically links a violent crime with a mental health issue or diagnosis, that decreases the likelihood for others to seek treatment.
3. **When reporting on rape and/or interpersonal violence, never blame the victim (as was suggested by the counselor in season 1). Violence is abuse and in these situations there is always a perpetrator and a victim.**
 - Make sure to spread the message that consent is a real and serious issue that everyone should be held accountable to.
 - Help the audience understand that regardless of someone's circumstances (for example being intoxicated or under the influence of an opioid), sexual assault is never ok.
 - Inform the audience that victims of sexual assault may live with permanent damages to their body, their emotions and their ability to interact with others.
4. **When reporting on bullying/cyberbullying:**
 - Do not convey that there is a causal link between bullying/cyberbullying and suicide. There is not and research does not support this. Bullying/cyberbullying has been identified as one of many other factors in the lives of those youth who took their own life, but again there is no research that proves there is a causal link between the two.
 - Do not use terms like "epidemic" and do not share fear-mongering messages that will induce further panic among adults. Provide calm, rational, level-headed facts that defuse alarm rather than cause it.
 - Understand that research is clear that formal penalties, laws, criminalization, etc., do not deter bullying/cyberbullying. In fact, the response from parents and the school – instead of from police or the Criminal Justice or Juvenile Justice system – have the strongest deterrent effect.
5. **Guidelines for reporting on mass shootings/violence can be found here:** <https://www.reportingonmassshootings.org/>

Recommendations for Reporting on Substance Abuse

1. **Help your audience understand the realities of addiction.**
 - Addiction is a disease that is diagnosed by healthcare professionals around the world. Addiction to a substance, whether alcohol, opioids or other legal and illegal drugs affects the brain and the body. Clinically, a behavior that results in compulsive use of one or more substances, despite serious health and social consequences, can be diagnosed as an addiction.
 - Addiction impacts various parts of the brain that are responsible for reward, judgment, behaviors, thoughts and memory. It always alters the brain and that can, for some, have detrimental effects.
 - Addiction can happen at any age, but often begins during adolescence, and can happen to anyone, even those who believe they are strong enough not to get addicted to a substance.
2. **Present the facts about substance use.**
 - Share data on prevalence of various types of drug use based on age, gender and other community profile data.
 - Inform your audience on the dangers of substance abuse, warning signs and symptoms of someone who might be abusing drugs and/or alcohol, and where to go for help.

Get Help

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or chat at suicidepreventionlifeline.org (USA)
- [Crisis Text Line](#): text "START" to 741741 (USA)
- [SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#)
- [SAMHSA Prevention Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center, After a Suicide: Toolkit for Schools](#)
- [School Violence Prevention](#)
- ["13 Reasons Why" Netflix Series\(Season 1\): Considerations for Educators and Families](#)
- [bethe1to.com](#) for five steps you can take to help someone in your life that might be in crisis
- www.jedfoundation.org/help
- [The Samaritans \(UK and Ireland\)](#) 116 123

Additional Resources

- <https://parents.au.reachout.com/>
- National Association of School Psychologists, www.nasponline.org
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, www.save.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- American Association of Suicidology, www.suicidology.org
- Stopbullying.gov
- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, www.rainn.org
- Take 5 to Save Lives, www.take5tosavelives.org
- 13reasonswhy.info/
- [The Trevor Project](http://TheTrevorProject.org)
- www.yourmentalhealth.ie
- [Be Vocal Speak Up - Tips for Representing Mental Health in Language and Imagery](#)