

From Sarah Reik - WLCFS

*I thought this would be a good follow up to the document we received today. Here are the authors:*

[The Raising Boys and Girls team](#) is made of Sissy Goff, Melissa Trevathan and David Thomas. Between the three of them, they have over seventy-five years of experience counseling kids and families. They work at a place called [Daystar Counseling](#).

*The article is dated April 25, 2017.*

***So many problems with this show. Please be aware if you are watching it with an adolescent, or if you struggle with depression yourself. - Sarah Reik***

Raising Awareness is a double-edged sword. In other words, it cuts both ways...which feels particularly poignant in the awareness the new Netflix series, 13 Reasons Why, has raised since its release in March.

You've probably heard of it recently. Schools are sending out emails about it. Churches are talking about it. And teenagers are DEFINITELY talking about it. In fact, every teenager I've asked about it in the last week has used the same words, "It's the show everyone is talking about all of the time." And I honestly don't believe that's teenage hyperbole.

Let me explain a little about my perspective. I've been a counselor to girls for over 24 years. I've written several parenting books and speak at churches and schools across the country about parenting related issues. I'm privileged to work at a counseling practice called [Daystar Counseling Ministries](#), that's been serving the needs of the kids and families in the Nashville community since 1985. We currently see over 1400 families. And I'm deeply concerned about this TV show.

As a counseling staff, we would wholeheartedly agree that awareness needs to be raised around so many of the issues addressed by 13 Reasons Why: bullying, self-harm, rape and suicide. The statistics are tragically rising on each of those issues, and we're seeing evidence of it daily in our offices. We're doing our best to battle them with information, wisdom and hope for both kids and families. But awareness does cut both ways, specifically for teenagers.

Here's why I'm concerned:

**1) Teenagers are highly susceptible to the graphic portrayal of self-harm and rape that take place in the show.**

We've long held to certain guidelines as to the way we run our group counseling sessions at Daystar. We have many teenagers (and even some children) who have self-harmed in one way or another. It's devastating to hear them talk about the emotional pain that leads up to these acts, as well as the scars that are left, as a result. Some of these kids talk openly about their struggles with self-harm in group. We want them to receive encouragement and support from their peers. We don't, however, want them to get ideas. We know how susceptible adolescents are to images and ideas, especially those that are dramatic in their intensity and that might lean toward a "quick fix." And so, in our group counseling sessions, we don't allow them to talk specifically about how they've harmed. In other words, they can talk

about struggling with the concept in front of other kids, but not share the specifics as to how or where. We're concerned that the graphic cutting scene in 13 Reasons Why can offer kids not just awareness, but too much information—graphic information on self-harm.

The show also includes a graphic rape scene. A few teenagers have talked about this scene with concerning callousness. We don't want them to be desensitized to rape. We want them to see it as the horrendous act that it is. And, as in all of these issues, we want any child who is sexually assaulted in any way to seek and believe that there is help.

## **2) Suicide seems to have a ripple effect.**

Years ago, when Kurt Cobain took his own life, we had multiple teenagers come for counseling who were struggling with suicidal ideation. Over the course of time we've been in practice, it's happened every time there's a highly publicized suicide: whether that person is someone they know from the media or someone they know personally.

Since last week, we've had at least a dozen teenagers talk about the effect this show has had on their emotional lives. One girl who has struggled with depression, self-harm, and even been hospitalized for suicidal ideation, said that this show was "the most triggering thing I've seen since I've left the hospital." She said she hasn't wanted to cut in months, but she did when she saw the show. We've heard some version of the same thoughts from other teenagers struggling with self-harm and depression.

## **3) The portrayal of the real issue of mental health and the help offered were both minimal.**

One teenager went on to say, "They never really talked about mental health. For someone to commit suicide means they're sick. The show doesn't talk enough about the sickness part of it. People who want to commit suicide aren't really angry and after vengeance. They're hurting and have lost hope." A group of teenage boys used that very word, "hopeless", to describe how they felt after watching the show.

In addition, Hannah didn't receive the counseling she needed in response to her struggles. The portrayal of counseling on the show was ineffective. We want kids to believe strongly in counseling. We want them to share their struggles with their school counselors, to tell their parents they need help when things are difficult. In short, we want them to believe that mental health is a serious issue, but one that is never meant to be faced alone. There is always hope. And there are trained professionals who can help.

## **4) The whole premise behind the show is that others are to blame.**

The 13 Reasons are 13 people she says are the "why" of her suicide. In other words, they caused it. Suicide has been compared to a bomb. Those in closest radius are harmed the most. But the blast impacts all within any kind of proximity, with varying degrees. Every child we have ever seen who has been touched by suicide wonders, to some degree, if the

suicide could have been their fault...if they could have done something to prevent it. It doesn't matter if the suicide is a friend, classmate, or even a parent. We struggle desperately to convince both children and teenagers this is NEVER the case. Again, suicide is a mental health issue. The problem is much bigger than one missed conversation or intervention. We don't ever want anyone to be left—for the rest of their lives—believing they caused someone else's suicide. This show opens up that idea as an option for any teenager whose life is touched by suicide.

##### **5) Suicide was the resolution of Hannah's struggles.**

And the suicide is portrayed with all of the graphicness and drama that Hollywood can bring. Suicide is never the resolution. For anyone. Of any age. It's not heroic or romantic. It's terribly tragic. And impacts the lives of everyone left in its wake permanently. It's not a solution. We want kids to hear this strongly, in response to this show. In fact, we've written a letter to teenagers who might have seen it that you can find [here](#).

Kids are talking about this show. We need to take back that conversation, as adults. If you have a teenager, check your Netflix account to see if they've watched it. Talk to them about it. If they're younger, make sure your Netflix settings are set to keep them from viewing material with content that's too mature for them. If they haven't yet seen it, they probably don't need to. If they've already seen it, have them tell you what they thought. What they learned. What they felt when they watched it. And then, share truth with them, and hope. Here's the truth we believe they really need to hear, in light of the tragic elements of 13 Reasons Why.

You will be hurt. Other people will say and do things to you that are hurtful, at times. You may be bullied. If you are, talk to someone. Tell me. Tell your school counselors. Tell a teacher or youth director. Someone can help. The show may feel like what really goes on at your school sometimes. I want to hear about it. But what I want you to know is that darkness never wins. It does in this show. But, it doesn't in real life. More than anything, it doesn't because of Christ and His love for you. He is the light and the light wins. There is hope. Always. There are people who love you and can help. Me included. You're going to have hard things happen in your life. But hurting yourself is never the answer. And you never have to be in it alone. **The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:5**

The Jed Foundation has some great talking points to go over with your kids, as well. You can download their PDF [here](#).