



Based on Jay Asher's novel, **13 Reasons Why** is a short series released on Netflix on **March 31**. There is definitely cause for parental warning for language and content, but that doesn't mean that it's just another vulgar film. And, it's far from being just another teen movie.

This story takes young adults and their emotions seriously, with dimension and development throughout the plot and its flashbacks. The old, over-used stereotypes are replaced with an actual personal angle on each character, driving towards the truth of human dignity.

After a spell of tormenting bullying at school, Hannah Baker, the main character, commits suicide. **The series begins after her death when Clay Jensen, her almost-boyfriend and friend, starts listening to her tapes revealing thirteen reasons why she killed herself.** She was often written-off as an attention-seeking drama queen, but after watching the story, you realize that everyone's life is full of real, heavy conflict. Each reason is revealed in one of the thirteen episodes of the series. **Each reason is a person—former friends, backstabbers, an ex-boyfriend, and even a rapist.**

After watching 13 Reasons Why, you will not be without things to talk about. **Each of the thirteen talking points below is inspired by the corresponding episode in the series:**

1. Truth is the least popular

Hannah makes it clear that she didn't kill herself because of a boy. Her first kiss was a wonderful memory, which she was happy to leave that way, but it was quickly ruined with an unfortunate photo and a horrid rumor. Once labeled a slut, she couldn't save her reputation and wisely shares that the truth is the least popular.

Spreading a lie – no matter how popular it is – can only cause harm. What can you do from now on to protect yourself and others from any degrading label's harm, whether the rumors are true or false?

2. Maybe you're guilty because you didn't do anything

The next issue we see is a series of fair-weather friendships. After her best friend moves away, Hannah has genuine friendships with two specific peers, but suddenly, these end without explanation. Without any closure, her wounds are left open. She mentions that some people are just as guilty for doing nothing at all- a smile, a wave, a quick conversation in the halls, a polite warning.

Do you make sure your friends know their importance no matter the “weather” in life or be sure to follow-up with closure after “stormy” incidents?

3. “You’ve never been a girl”

Rather than push aside teen emotions as hormones, 13 Reasons Why emphasizes that young adults feel an intense amount of emotion often without understanding what to do with it. Hannah’s statement about being a girl starts to get you thinking about how the different sexes experience the turmoils of adolescence. Hannah’s story highlights a common female issue – becoming more a toy or object than a person. She feels irredeemably objectified.

What helps you process your emotions? Do you take others seriously or just write them off as hormonal, or even irredeemable?

4. “Society of stalkers”

Her safe space, we discover, is also invaded. School was already a cluster of “slut-shaming,” despite it all being based on a lie. Her stalker, Tyler Down, took pictures of her outside her window. When she and a new friend Courtney set a trap for the stalker, a game of dare distracts them, and Tyler ends up spreading a scandalous photo. Courtney will do anything to prevent the photo from revealing her deepest secret of same sex attraction, and Hannah has lost another friend.

In a world of social media, what can you do to protect yourself and others from being invaded via photos, hacking, or simply “Facebook stalking” and other forms of researching a person instead of actually befriending them?

5. A David and Goliath Connection

People’s opinion of us is a huge part of our life, unfortunately, and we often feel like we’re alone against the whole world. Hannah was only one person against the world. Clay became that one person against the world. Hannah’s parents are a “David” facing a “Goliath” in a lawsuit. Facing what people think of you, your family, and your choices is much more bearable with a friend. As Catholics, we have Jesus Christ and hopefully family and close friends at our side.

How can you become strong enough to face any Goliath in your life and help others know that they don't need to fall under their burdens but can be triumphant like David?

6. Parents

A project, homework, studying – parents bowed out the moment their child said wherever they were going or whatever they did was for school. We see a variety of parenting styles in 13 Reasons Why. Clay's mom tells him what most teenagers find hard to understand: "I can't help you unless you talk to me." It's often difficult for these kids to put their thoughts and experiences into words, and parents tend to not give them the time.

What adult can you tell anything without feeling like you're going to just be in trouble? Do you know how to respect and obey parents but also forgive them when they make mistakes?

7. Stolen Little Bunny Doodles

When Zach steals class compliment notes to Hannah, we see just how much the smallest thing, like a peer's bunny doodle, can affect a person. St. Therese of Lisieux shares, "Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love." A single note may not have stopped her death, but it could have delayed her despair long enough that more help could've changed her course. Like too many her age, she was left alone.

What reminds you that you aren't alone? Do you let little things break you or build you up?

8. Safe space

We see "Safe Space" signs around the high school's halls, but it was far from being a safe for these characters. The school's posters are a band-aid solution for suicide, acceptance, and drunk driving. What is needed is a change of classroom and school culture entirely. Hannah found a safe space in a poetry group with Ryan Shaver. Her safe space shattered when he shared anonymous copies of her poem. When a teacher read it to her class, she analyzed it with high compliments, overlooking the suicidal lines at the end, but Hannah's peers laughed at it.

As Catholics, how can we create a charitable safe space in our parish, home, and community for all of God's children, even those who make life choices opposite of ours?

9. Blaming the Victim

Victim blaming happens when the victim of someone else's choice is blamed because of

something the victim wore, said, or did. We see how victims blame themselves enough for situations. For instance, Jessica, who was drunk and passed out at a party, was raped while Hannah stays hidden in the room, frozen in terror. People who choose to assault others often blame their victims for wearing clothes or doing something that “asked for it,” rather than accept their guilt of their own actions. Jessica is only guilty of getting too drunk, but Bryce is guilty of the rape.

What is real consent? Do you take responsibility for your choices and hold others accountable for theirs?

10. Courage

Sheri knocks down a stop sign and drives away scared, despite Hannah’s advice. Later that night, because of the missing stop sign, Clay’s friend Jerry dies in a car crash. These high schoolers constantly keep secrets. Clay asks if, in a way, he killed Hannah, and his friend Tony wisely answers that Hannah killed herself; it was her choice, but they all led her there.

It takes an enormous amount of courage to do the right thing in the moment. Do you have a friend or parent who can be your guide in any tough situation?

11. You don’t know what’s going on in everyone’s life.

Students are often under greater pressure to earn a scholarship than to be a good person. Parents do less parenting and more career counseling. In each character, we see a snapshot of their struggles, how they chose to react to them, and how their actions affect others. Jessica becomes an alcoholic after her rape. Justin’s drug-addicted mom keeps a physically abusive boyfriend around, which essentially makes Justin homeless. Characters try to “self medicate” their issues through bullying others, substance abuse, suicide, and fights.

How can you responsibly try to understand those who struggle with vastly different burdens than your own by simply listening?

12. “If anyone of us had been her friend...”

Entrusted with carrying out the tape project after Hannah died, Tony realizes that just as these people didn’t know what was going on in Hannah’s life, Hannah didn’t know what was going on in theirs. One even shoots himself. They all really needed real friends, even Bryce who needed a real friend to stop him. Tony confesses to Hannah’s parents that he hasn’t been telling them everything, and he gives them a digital copy of the recordings, which is just what they may need in their lawsuit against the school.

Who is really the victim? When someone commits suicide, who else gets hurt?

13. Society's Priorities

Society should take serious issues seriously. If a teen says they have a problem, it should be treated as a real problem because it is real for them. The adults in this story appear to overlook the seriousness of cyber bullying. While their teens are too connected with technology, the grown-ups are disconnected from both social media and their teens.

Mr. Porter, the school counselor who Hannah attempted to reach out to, tells Clay, "You can't love someone back to life." Clay doesn't accept that answer and says that we can try: "It has to get better the way we treat each other. It has to get better somehow." Clay doesn't just say these things; he begins to live them and immediately strikes up a conversation with Sky, a distant friend who he knows cuts herself.

Do you act with integrity (i.e., are you the same person), whether in person or over the internet or phone?

Young adults tend to keep many secrets, but it's no secret that they are hurting, especially due to all the chaos that surrounds them. When you notice that someone is hurting, it is your responsibility to do everything you can to be a lifeline or find a lifeline for them. **We can't humanly fix everyone's problems, but we can treat everyone better. If you hear something, say something.** They may not realize that their difficult situation will eventually end, and that end never has to be suicide.

There is always something you can do: pray for them.