



BY CHRIS PARKER

13 REASONS why

13

REASONS WHY NOT

If you have not heard about the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, you can be sure that your teen probably has. If the amount of tweets posted during the recent releases of the first episodes is an indicator, it may be Netflix's most popular series yet. Young adults (and younger) are certainly buzzing about it.

It depicts the story of Hannah Baker, and her suicide, through 13 tape recordings explaining why she is about to kill herself. Thirteen of her classmates receive the tapes and learn of their contribution to her decision through bullying, sexual abuse, exclusion, stalking, etc.

WHAT PROFESSIONALS ARE SAYING

Unlike the book, the Netflix series holds nothing back in its graphic depiction of rape and suicide (including Hannah's mum finding her bloodied body in their bathtub). The series is rated MA for mature audiences only, however, this may well not be deterring a number of younger teens from watching.

Netflix may have deliberately sensationalised the portrayal compared to the book. The suicide scene ignores the American Association of Suicidology guidelines for the safe portrayal and discussion of suicide in the media.

Many health professionals are raising concerns. Headspace issued the following warning:

This show directly exposes viewers to very risky suicide content and may lead to a very distressing reaction by the viewer particularly if the audience is children and young people. National and international research clearly indicates the very real impact and risk to harmful suicide exposure leading to increased risk and possible suicide contagion.

Mental Health First Aid Australia also raise concerns and strongly recommend that if teens are going to watch, then parents should watch it with them.

READING VS WATCHING I have read the original novel (and started watching the Netflix series). The novel does not provide any description of the suicide and other issues like the rape are not dealt with in detail. I would strongly encourage that if your teen is really wanting to see the show then a compromise could be that you guide them to the book (or read it with them).

REASONS WHY NOT The book is a helpful young adult novel that deals with the cumulative trauma that can come from the nasty side of teen peer relationships. This key theme of the book makes it highly commendable—particularly when Hannah's final recorded words encourage her peers to look out for a particular fellow student who is showing signs of depression but is going under everyone's radar.

However, the book (and TV series) doesn't really offer any hopeful alternatives to suicide when life gets really tough. There is often a pervasive undercurrent of hopelessness among the cultural narratives of teen culture. Hence, parents and teachers should be encouraged to be continually telling the ultimate hopeful story of life—the good news that God has a plan to restore the brokenness of all things and that His son Jesus has experienced the despair and pain that we sometimes feel and has conquered them for us, His people.

Resources

"Dangerous Content in 13 Reasons Why" article: Headspace <http://tinyurl.com/k79znjv> (or search for "headspace 13 reasons why")

"13 Reasons Why Not" article: Oakland Press - <http://tinyurl.com/km8b3vx> (or search for "oakland press 13 reasons why")

Discussion resources: Mental Health First Aid Australia <http://tinyurl.com/k7m95xx> (or search for "mhfa 13 reasons")

"13 Reasons Why is Deceptive and Destructive" article: The Gospel Coalition <http://tinyurl.com/lze56cj> (or search for "TGC 13 reasons")

- 1 He will comfort you (Isaiah 49:13)
- 2 He will give you hope (Romans 15:13)
- 3 He will guide you (Psalm 32:8)
- 4 He will deliver (Matthew 7:7)
- 5 He will forgive (Acts 10:43)
- 6 He will take away your worries (1 Peter 5:7)
- 7 He dwells in you (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)
- 8 You are given strength to persevere (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- 9 You have a purpose (Jeremiah 29:11)
- 10 Your burdens will be carried (Psalm 55:22)
- 11 You are loved (John 3:16)
- 12 You are not alone (Deuteronomy 31:6)
- 13 You were created by Him and for His glory (Isaiah 43:7)

Chris is passionate about helping children to see the world through the gospel of the Lord Jesus. He is currently a lecturer and speaker with the National Institute for Christian Education and on the executive team of CEN. Chris and his wife, Coco, live in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. They have two children and a growing collection of ukuleles.

