

“13 Reasons Why” Netflix Series: How School Counselors Can Help

The teenage years are typically marked by turbulent emotions and stress. The Netflix series “13 Reasons Why” has highlighted the impact and consequences of teen suicide when friends, parents, teachers and school counselors aren’t aware of or don’t know how to intervene when a student needs help.

Often mental health struggles come to light only in the public extremes, when an outburst or tragic event or television show forces us to stop and ask “Why?” Because it is not a physical disability but one involving brain chemistry, mental illness is often a private struggle that hides in the corners of our school hallways.

Educating students, staff members and parents about mental health issues is critical to the work of school counselors. School counselors know students who struggle socially and emotionally are vulnerable to academic failure. Instinctively, others know this as well but often don’t have the tools they need or understand that school counselors can provide help.

School counselors have specific training to recognize warning signs, such as:

- changes in school performance (e.g. grades, attendance)
- changes in mood
- complaints of illness
- increased disciplinary problems at school
- problems experienced at home or family situations (stress, trauma, divorce, substance abuse, poverty, domestic violence)
- communication from teachers about problems at school
- difficulty dealing with existing mental health concerns

How to Address Issues Related to “13 Reasons Why” Within a Comprehensive School Counseling Program

These components from the delivery system of the ASCA National Model (pp. 83-98) may be helpful.

School counseling core curriculum lessons

- Consider presenting preventive classroom lessons and universal interventions such as working through transitions, dealing with stress or anxiety, coping skills, balancing school/home/community activities, communicating feelings to others, and recognizing when a peer is having difficulty.
- Deliver school counseling core curriculum that proactively enhances awareness of mental health; promotes positive, healthy behaviors; and seeks to remove the stigma associated with mental health issues
- Emphasize expressing any concerns about self or others to a supportive adult, including parents, teachers and your school counselor.
- Consider collecting results data such as:
 - *Perception:* Students can recognize three signs of stress or anxiety in self or others.
 - *Outcome:* Attendance – Identified students have an attendance rate of 96 percent or higher each quarter of this school year.

- *Behavior:* Bullying behaviors of 7th grade students will decrease by 15% by the end of the year.

Individual Planning

Provide individual planning with students to address academic, career and social/emotional (including mental health) needs.

Responsive Services

Provide targeted interventions for students with mental health and behavioral health concerns.

- *Individual counseling* – Provide short-term (6-8 sessions) counseling for students who are having difficulty dealing with stress, emotions or other issues. Develop goals with students related to utilization of stress management and coping skills.
- *Consultation* – Share strategies with parents to help them support their students when stressed or having difficulties. Encourage them to support appropriate coping skills and communication about feelings, anxieties or fears. Help parents recognize a healthy balance between school, home and community activities. Share community resources for activities, stress management and where to go for help if needed.
- *Collaboration* – Collaborate with teachers, administrators and other school staff to develop plans to identify and support students dealing with stress, anxiety or having difficulties with peer relationships. Share symptoms of suicide ideation and how to respond to get help for a student in need. Develop a crisis plan for the school to support students when dealing with difficult community issues or death.
- *Referrals for counseling and crisis intervention* – Develop a list of school and community referral sources focused on mental health or situational (e.g. grief, difficult transitions) concerns for when a student needs support beyond school counseling activities and short-term counseling. Make this list

available to parents, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders.

Leadership, Advocacy, Collaboration and Systemic Change

- Recognize and address barriers to access of mental health services, including cultural and linguistic impediments.
- Discuss and discourage stigma related to mental health issues and services.
- Advocate and collaborate with school and community stakeholders to ensure students and their families have access to mental health services.
- Seek to continually update professional knowledge regarding student social/emotional needs

What ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors Standards Apply to Issues From “13 Reasons Why”?

The following [ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors](#) standards may be helpful in guiding your discussions and activities.

<p>Category 1: Mindset Standards School counselors encourage the following mindsets for all students.</p>
<p>M 1. Believe in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being.</p>

<p>Category 2: Behavior Standards Students will demonstrate the following standards through classroom lessons, activities and/or individual/small-group counseling.</p>
<p>B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem</p>
<p>B-SMS 8. Demonstrate the ability to balance school, home and community activities</p>
<p>B-SMS 9. Demonstrate personal safety skills</p>
<p>B-SMS 10. Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities</p>
<p>B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication skills and listening skills</p>

B-SS 2. Create positive and supportive relationships with other students

B-SS 3. Create relationships with adults that support success

What ASCA Ethical Standards Apply to Issues From “13 Reasons Why”?

A. RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDENTS

A.1. Supporting Student Development

School counselors:

a. Have a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals.

b. Aim to provide counseling to students in a brief context and support students and families/guardians in obtaining outside services if the student needs long-term clinical counseling.

A.2. Confidentiality

School counselors:

d. Explain the limits of confidentiality in developmentally appropriate terms through multiple methods such as student handbooks, school counselor department websites, school counseling brochures, classroom curriculum and/or verbal notification to individual students.

e. Keep information confidential unless legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed or a breach is required to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to the student. Serious and foreseeable harm is different for each minor in schools and is determined by students’ developmental and chronological age, the setting, parental rights and the nature of the harm. School counselors consult with appropriate professionals when in doubt as to the validity of an exception.

f. Recognize their primary ethical obligation for confidentiality is to the students but balance that obligation with an understanding of parents’/guardians’ legal and inherent rights to be the guiding voice in their children’s lives. School counselors understand the need to balance students’ ethical rights to make choices,

their capacity to give consent or assent, and parental or familial legal rights and responsibilities to make decisions on their child’s behalf.

A.9. Serious and Foreseeable Harm to Self and Others

School counselors:

a. Inform parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when a student poses a serious and foreseeable risk of harm to self or others. When feasible, this is to be done after careful deliberation and consultation with other appropriate professionals. School counselors inform students of the school counselor’s legal and ethical obligations to report the concern to the appropriate authorities unless it is appropriate to withhold this information to protect the student (e.g. student might run away if he/she knows parents are being called). The consequence of the risk of not giving parents/guardians a chance to intervene on behalf of their child is too great. Even if the danger appears relatively remote, parents should be notified

c. Do not release a student who is a danger to self or others until the student has proper and necessary support. If parents will not provide proper support, the school counselor takes necessary steps to underscore to parents/guardians the necessity to seek help and at times may include a report to child protective services.

d. Report to parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when students disclose a perpetrated or a perceived threat to their physical or mental well-being. This threat may include, but is not limited to, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, dating violence, bullying or sexual harassment. The school counselor follows applicable federal, state and local laws and school district policy.

What School Staff Members Need to Know About Issues From “13 Reasons Why”

Warning signs - Educate school staff about mental health concerns of students and the warning signs of anxiety, stress and suicide ideation. Include recognition that environmental factors at school or home may cause or exacerbate mental health issues.

Where to go for help – Ensure all staff know to which school staff they should report concerns about students or staff (school counselors, social workers, psychologists, administrators, etc.). Emphasize the importance of sharing concerns early before a serious issue arises.

How to reduce or eliminate stigma – Help school staff with strategies to recognize and eliminate stigma related to mental health issues and services in their classroom, office and throughout school facilities.

What Parents Need to Know About Issues From “13 Reasons Why”

Warning signs – Share information with parents about the warning signs of anxiety, stress and suicide ideation. Include recognition that environmental factors at school or home may cause or exacerbate mental health issues.

School resources – Let parents know school counselors and other school staff are always a resource to collaborate on issues and help their children achieve success.

Community resources – Publicize community resources for additional assistance including individuals and organizations that treat mental health issues (suicidal ideation, violence, abuse and depression).

What Students Need to Know About Issues From “13 Reasons Why”

Warning signs – Share information with students about the warning signs of anxiety, stress and suicide ideation. Emphasize that these signs should not be treated lightly, and they should let a trusted adult know immediately if they have concerns about themselves or others.

School resources – Let students know school counselors and other school staff are there to help. If they have any concerns about themselves or others, they should tell a teacher, school counselor or other trusted adult immediately.

Talk with your parents/guardians – Encourage students to discuss concerns about themselves or others with their parents. If a student is reluctant to talk with a parent, help the student prepare to have the discussion.

Additional Resources

[The Role of the School Counselor](#)

ASCA Position Statement: [The School Counselor and Student Mental Health](#)

ASCA Position Statement: [The School Counselor and Trauma-Informed Practice](#)

[Lead Mental Health Efforts](#), *ASCA School Counselor* (2014)

[Suicide: Err on the Side of Caution](#), *ASCA School Counselor* (2013)

[Student Suicide: Legal and Ethical Implications](#), *ASCA School Counselor* (2012)

[Mental health surveillance among children – United States, 2005-2011](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010).

Erickson, A., & Abel, N. R. (2013). [A high school counselor’s leadership in providing schoolwide](#)

[screenings for depression and enhancing suicide awareness](#). *Professional School Counseling*, 16(5), 283-289. doi: 10.5330/psc.n.2013-16.283

Coalition to Support Grieving Students:
<https://grievingstudents.org>

[Foundation for the Advancement of Alcohol Responsibility](#)

[National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)

[The National Center for Victims of Crime](#)

[CDC Fact Sheet on Underage Drinking](#)