



# School Safety Newsletter

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## San Bernardino Shooting Puts Spotlight on School Safety

EdSource, April 10, 2017

<https://edsource.org/2017/san-bernardino-shooting-puts-spotlight-on-school-safety/580043>

In the wake of the fatal shooting on April 10, 2017 at a San Bernardino elementary school, schools and security experts across California revisited campus safety protocols intended to keep students safe from gun violence.

“As we mourn and remember the victims of today’s school shooting tragedy, we will continue to instill safety and vigilance in making our campuses as safe as possible,” Steven Zipperman, chief of the Los Angeles Unified School Police, said Monday. “While no educational institution can ever be 100 percent safe from an intruder or other safety threat, maintaining vigilant planning, preparedness, response and recovery protocols can help prevent and mitigate tragedies.”

In Monday’s incident, 53-year-old Cedric Anderson of Riverside visited North Park Elementary School, checked in at the front office, and then fatally shot his estranged wife, Karen Smith, in the special education classroom where she was teaching. An 8-year-old boy, Jonathan Martinez, was also killed, and a 9-year-old is hospitalized in stable condition.

Everytown for Gun Safety, a nonpartisan group that supports reducing gun violence, has tracked 113 school shootings since 2013. It began tracking school violence after the Dec. 14, 2012 shooting rampage at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Ct., that left 20 children and seven adults dead, including the gunman. The city of San Bernardino is still recovering from another shooting, on Dec. 2, 2015, that left 14 people dead at a regional center.

Although school shootings are relatively rare, elementary schools are seen as particularly vulnerable because they usually lack metal detectors and security guards or on-campus police. Most school guards and resource officers work at middle and high schools. To control their campuses, elementary schools often have a single point of entry.

Maria Garcia, spokeswoman for the San Bernardino school district, said the North Park Elementary school staff followed protocol, requiring Cedric Anderson to sign in before visiting his wife’s classroom.

“My understanding is he came in, he signed in and the staff was cordial to him because they recognized him,” she said. “They knew who he was. He told the staff he was bringing something to his wife that she had forgotten. There was nothing to indicate that there was any reason they should not allow him back there.”

No one in the district was aware of the couple’s estranged relationship, Garcia said. However, they wished that she had been willing to confide in someone.

“Unless we know, we can’t help or do anything,” she said.

After the Sandy Hook shootings, Garcia said the district thoroughly reviewed its safety plans and trained staff in how to deal with campus threats.

“We learned if the threat is inside, you do what you can to get the students as far away from the threat as

*Protecting our  
future through  
information  
sharing*

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## **San Bernardino Shooting Puts Spotlight on School Safety (Continued)**

possible, which was exactly what our teachers did,” she said. “They evacuated the students to the playground.”

Still, in the wake of this incident, Garcia said the district would again review its safety and security protocols and procedures.

“Our motto is: ‘We’re the best at getting better,’” she said. “There are going to be lessons learned out of this tragedy. It will not be in vain.”

Since the deadly shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999, California schools have enacted safety protocols meant to protect students and staff from gun violence. State law requires all public schools in California to have safety plans in case of an emergency, and for those plans to be updated annually.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson said Monday’s incident was a reminder for schools to update their plans.

“As we grieve for those who died or were injured, this is also a time to remind all California public schools to make sure they annually update their mandatory school safety plans,” he said, noting that the state Department of Education provides safety guidance for schools and waivers for schools affected by emergencies.

The California School Boards Association provided a list of trauma and safety resources for schools, along with guidance for safety plans and campus security.

Since Columbine, most schools in California have updated their safety protocols to require all visitors to check in at the front office, and enact evacuation and shelter-in-place plans in case of a crisis. Some schools also have fences, surveillance cameras, additional school police and security guards, and special emergency training for all school staff. The state does not track schools’ individual safety plans, and each district has leeway as to how such plans are funded.

Staff training might be the most important element of any school safety plan, said Kenneth Trump, president of National School Safety and Security Services, a school safety consulting firm based in Cleveland.

“We’re really encouraging schools to balance their security and emergency planning with not just hardware, but the human aspect of school safety,” he said. “We ask: ‘What plans did they have and did they follow them or did they not have any plans at all?’”

Instead of focusing mainly on fortifying buildings, Trump said school officials should also invest in training staff how to deal with people who may not be welcome on campus, the development of crisis teams, and partnerships with first responders. In addition, he said staff members should be encouraged to share with administrators their personal issues that could threaten their safety on campus.

Schools should also create visitor protocols, such as directing a teacher to meet a visitor in a conference room instead of in a classroom full of children, he said.

Still, school safety is a balancing act, said Ronald Stephens, executive director of the nonprofit National School Safety Center in Westlake Village near Los Angeles. Most school violence results from on-campus fights among students, not intruders with guns, he noted. School safety precautions generally have worked, he said.

“We can’t expect every school to have a SWAT team. ... You don’t want to scare students to pieces,” he said. “School is still the safest place for children to be. There’s a much greater chance of a student being harmed in their communities or at home.”

He noted that Sandy Hook had safety procedures in place. And the San Bernardino shooter had checked in to the front office, as required.

Every school should provide staff training, visitor screening protocols, emergency evacuation and shelter-in-place plans and a “threat assessment” team made up of school staff, local law enforcement and mental health professionals, he said.

“It’s difficult, if not impossible, to prevent all school crime,” he said. “But schools can be expected to provide a reasonably safe environment for everyone.”

## **Monthly Webinars!**

**First Wednesday of Every Month**

**at 10 am**

**(Except January, July, and August).**

### **Next Webinar**

**Wednesday,  
May 3, 2017**

Each webinar has a round table discussion at the end. Questions are always welcome!

To participate, you must be a vetted member. For more information please email [schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us](mailto:schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us)

# **'13 Reasons Why' Depicts A Graphic Suicide. Experts Say There's A Problem With That.**

The Washington Post, April 14, 2017

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/04/14/the-problem-with-how-13-reasons-why-treats-suicide/?utm\\_term=.74b6853d00f2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/04/14/the-problem-with-how-13-reasons-why-treats-suicide/?utm_term=.74b6853d00f2)

Netflix's "13 Reasons Why" offers a well-intentioned message about being kinder to others and asking for help when you need it, but some suicide prevention experts say the series could do more harm than good.

The 13-episode drama, co-produced by actress and pop star Selena Gomez, is based on Jay Asher's young-adult bestseller about Hannah Baker, a high school student who kills herself and leaves behind audiotapes detailing the events that led to her death. In each tape, she essentially blames her death on the actions (or inaction) of a group of classmates and a faculty member. That premise, along with a graphic scene depicting Hannah's death, is at odds with the way experts say we should talk about suicide.

The "Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide," a list of guidelines for media outlets developed by suicide prevention experts and journalists, emphasizes that suicide is usually the result of multiple causes, often involving mental illness, and not something that can be blamed on a person or single event. And experts advise against sensational headlines or describing a suicide in graphic detail, which studies have shown can lead to suicide contagion, or "copycat" suicides.

While "13 Reasons Why" is fiction, it presents similar concerns for advocates working to educate the public. In 2014, suicide was the second leading cause of death for children and young adults ages 10 to 24, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Teenagers, a key demographic for the book and, ostensibly, the series are at particular risk when it comes to contagion.

Dan Reidenberg, executive director of Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE), said he has received calls and emails from parents and school guidance counselors about the show. "There is a great amount of concern in the suicide prevention community around this series," he said.

The show deviates from the book and unfolds over a longer period of time, but the overall conceit is the same. For Reidenberg, the fact that Hannah gets to tell her story after her death, through the audiotapes, glamorizes the death and sends a potentially dangerous message to viewers.

"Young people are not that great at separating fiction from reality," Reidenberg said. "That gets even harder to do when you're struggling with thoughts."

Netflix does not make viewership numbers public, but there has been noticeable excitement around the series since its March 31 debut on the streaming service. Asher's book, first published in 2007, has maintained a loyal following and the series has garnered added buzz thanks to Gomez, who is an executive producer along with her mother, Mandy Teefey.

Gomez has talked openly about her own mental-health struggles. The former Disney star sought treatment at a rehab facility last year for "anxiety, panic attacks and depression," which she said were side effects of the lupus diagnosis she revealed publicly in 2015. Gomez and two of the cast members from the series recently got matching semicolon tattoos, intended to signify that life goes on after mental illness — an inspiration for the movement known as Project Semicolon.

"We wanted to do in a way where it was honest and we wanted to make something that can hopefully help people because suicide should never ever be an option," Gomez explains in the 30-minute featurette "Beyond the Reasons," also available on Netflix.

But, as suicide prevention advocate MollyKate Cline noted in an essay for Teen Vogue, "13 Reasons Why" fails to convey a viable alternative. Hannah never tells her parents or friends that she has suicidal thoughts. She eventually goes to her school's guidance counselor for help, but instead of offering treatment options, he questions her in ways that make it seem like the issues she's dealing with — including multiple instances of sexual assault — are her fault.

Reidenberg, who has seen several but not all of the episodes of the series, said the counselor's dismissal of Hannah's concerns sends "a horrible message."

SAVE partnered with the Jed Foundation, a youth suicide prevention group, to compile a list of talking points to help parents discuss the series with their teenagers. The list emphasizes that Hannah's experience with her guidance counselor isn't "appropriate or typical." And unlike the show, it uses the term mental illness. Well-established research suggests that 90 percent of individuals who commit suicide experience mental illness, but "13 Reasons Why" never explicitly considers whether Hannah is suffering from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or other issues.

# '13 Reasons Why' Depicts A Graphic Suicide. Experts Say There's A Problem With That. (Continued)

Mia Ray Langheim  
School Intelligence  
Officer



A representative for Netflix said in an email that four mental-health experts (some of whom appear in the featurette) consulted on the series — reviewing scripts and offering feedback to creator Brian Yorkey. A companion website links to the Jed Foundation and provides information for crisis hotlines in more than 35 countries. Several of the episodes in the series, including the one that depicts Hannah's suicide, begin with graphic-content warnings.

Yorkey told EW.com that depicting Hannah's suicide was a deliberate choice. "We worked very hard not to be gratuitous, but we did want it to be painful to watch because we wanted it to be very clear that there is nothing, in any way, worthwhile about suicide," he said.

But Reidenberg said "there should be no reason, no justification whatsoever, why any kind of production — entertainment or news — would be so descriptive and so graphic."

Reidenberg said TV shows and films can raise awareness and encourage discussion about suicide without appearing to glamorize it. He has consulted on TV projects, including an episode of "Grey's Anatomy" that debunked the long-standing myth about suicides spiking during the holidays.

With advocates and TV writers "working together, there can be great productions and depictions that actually help the public better understand suicide," Reidenberg added.

## **Additional Resources:**

**Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide.** Suicide is a public health issue. Media and online coverage of suicide should be informed by using best practices. Some suicide deaths may be newsworthy. However the way media cover suicide can influence behavior negatively by contributing to contagion, or positively by encouraging help-seeking. <http://reportingonsuicide.org/wp-content/themes/ros2015/assets/images/Recommendations-eng.pdf>

**The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273 (8255):** A free, 24/7 confidential service that can provide people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress, or those around them, with support, information, and local resources.

**Crisis Text Line: 741-741:** This free text-message service provides 24/7 support to those in crisis. Text 741-741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor right away.

**'13 Reason Why' Tips for Viewing & Discussing New Netflix Series** - In response to the series, JED and SAVE have drafted talking points to assist parents, teachers, and other gatekeepers in talking to youth about suicide as it relates to the situational drama that unfolds in 13 Reasons Why. <https://www.jedfoundation.org/13-reasons-why-talking-points/>

**13 Reasons Why: A Discussion for Educators** April 2017

## Suicide Prevention Community's Concerns about the Netflix Series

- **Graphic depiction of a suicide**
- **Over-identification may result in increased suicides**
- **Not addressing mental illness or alternatives to suicide**
- **Focus on the responsibility of others for the character's suicide**
- **Glamorization of suicide – notoriety of the character who dies, remorse of friends, the ability to tell the story from beyond through the tapes**
- **Example of memorial on student locker – not a recommended practice**
- **Failure of all adults to respond appropriately**

**13 REASONS WHY TALKING POINTS**

- 13 Reasons Why is a fictional story based on a widely known novel and is meant to be a cautionary tale.
- You may have similar experiences and thoughts as some of the characters in 13RW. People often identify with characters they see on TV or in movies. However, it is important to remember that there are healthy ways to cope with the topics covered in 13RW and acting on suicidal thoughts is not one of them.
- If you have watched the show and feel like you need support or someone to talk to reach out. Talk with a friend, family member, a counselor, or therapist. There is always someone who will listen.
- Suicide is not a common response to life's challenges or adversity. The vast majority of people who experience bullying, the death of a friend, or any other adversity described in 13RW do not die by suicide. In fact, most reach out, talk to others and seek help or find other productive ways of coping. They go on to lead healthy, normal lives.
- Suicide is never a heroic or romantic act. Hannah's suicide (although fictional) is a cautionary tale, not meant to appear heroic and should be viewed as a tragedy.
- It is important to know that, in spite of the portrayal of a serious treatment failure in 13RW, there are many treatment options for life challenges, distress and mental illness. Treatment works.
- Suicide affects everyone and everyone can do something to help if they see or hear warning signs that someone is at risk of suicide.
- Talking openly and honestly about emotional distress and suicide is ok. It will not make someone more suicidal or put the idea of suicide in their mind. If you are concerned about someone, ask them about it.
- Knowing how to acknowledge and respond to someone who shares their thoughts of emotional distress or suicide with you is important. Don't judge them or their thoughts. Listen. Be caring and kind. Offer to stay with them. Offer to go with them to get help or to contact a crisis line.
- How the guidance counselor in 13RW responds to Hannah's thoughts of suicide is not appropriate and not typical of most counselors. School counselors are professionals and a trustworthy source for help. If your experience with a school counselor is unhelpful, seek other sources of support such as a crisis line.
- While not everyone will know what to say or have a helpful reaction, there are people who do, so keep trying to find someone who will help you. If someone tells you they are suicidal, take them seriously and get help.
- When you die you do not get to make a movie or talk to people any more. Leaving messages from beyond the grave is a dramatization produced in Hollywood and is not possible in real life.
- Memorializing someone who died by suicide is not a recommended practice. Decorating someone's locker who died by suicide and/or taking selfies in front of such a memorial is not appropriate and does not honor the life of the person who died by suicide.
- Hannah's tapes blame others for her suicide. Suicide is never the fault of survivors of suicide loss. There are resources and support groups for suicide loss survivors.

If you're struggling with thoughts of suicide...

- Text "START" to 741741
- Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Talking points by:

[www.save.org](http://www.save.org) | [www.jedfoundation.org](http://www.jedfoundation.org)

**School Safety Newsletter**  
Statewide Terrorism &  
Intelligence Center  
2200 S. Dirksen Parkway  
Springfield, IL 62703  
Phone: 217-558-2661  
E-Mail:  
Schoolsafety  
@isp.state.il.us