



## **13 Reasons Why Not**

### **An Idea for a Student Engagement Suicide Prevention Project**

To address the Netflix's show **13 Reasons Why**, Oxford High School in Michigan created a school wide initiative to remind students on campus of the positive impact they can have on their classmates and peers. The project, which was developed by Ms. Fine, the Dean at Oxford High School, was intended to reinforce positive messages about reaching out for help and supporting others. The project seeks to show students that by sharing experiences and identifying those who have been supportive and helpful, students can reach out and find the help and support they need. The project is a 14-day activity that plays a daily recording of a student detailing how someone helped them overcome a difficult situation. On the 14<sup>th</sup> day, a recording from a senior is heard that sparks students to continue the conversation, followed by classroom discussions. The project's impact was evaluated by Michigan State University with a report due to be released in the Fall of 2017. Preliminary findings indicate the project enabled students to feel more comfortable talking about suicide. The following outlines the steps needed to implement the activity.

#### **Preparation**

1. Administrative approval
  - Obtain principal (or as appropriate district) approval if needed for the project. Teachers and counselor should be informed of the project and provided information on suicide prevention including how to recognize warning signs of distress as well as referral and crisis protocols.
2. Identify support staff for program implementation
  - Identify technology and media staff to assist with recordings and technical logistics of playing the tapes.
  - Ensure counselors and/or the crisis team are available for additional support and have been reminded of assessment and referral procedures.

*Suggestion: Equip teachers with tools such as [talking points](#) and [discussion guides](#) to address the topic of each tape.*

3. Identify students and at least one staff member who will share stories

All stories should be vetted by the staff member coordinating the activity and by an individual with a background in mental health for appropriate content. For stories to be shared they should be created by a junior or senior, and:

- Include a struggle/problem
- NOT identify anyone directly (call someone out)
- Identify someone they want to thank for helping them through the struggle/problem. (This should not be a boyfriend/girlfriend or an adult.)
- Conclude with a positive message about suicide prevention

*Important Note: The students recording a “tape” audio recording, their parents and the project coordinator at the school should review the story together. The story should be read verbatim to the parent by the student to ensure everyone is on the same page. In addition, it should be made clear that these audio recordings will live online and could potentially receive local and national media attention.*

4. Parent Engagement: Draft letter/email explaining project

Parents should be provided with information explaining the project including contact information for the project lead staff, additional information about school/district suicide prevention efforts, information about warning signs for suicide and local resources.

5. Identify social media outlets where students can post positive and supportive messages to those who will share stories.

### **Project Implementation (14-day project)**

1. **Day 1 to Day 13:** Play audio recording each day during morning announcements or cycle tapes by class period (day 1 =period 1; day 2=period 2, etc).
  - a. Post Social Media posts as soon as audio is heard. Be sure to monitor social media daily.
  - b. Each day provide information about resources students can access if needed (e.g. counselors, crisis team, crisis hotlines). *Suggested Resources:*  
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255  
Crisis Text Line: Text “HOME” to 741-741
2. **Day 14:** Play last day message from senior indicating: “This is your school- how will you move forward?” and encourage teachers to have a classroom discussion.

For more information and support contact [shanti@directingchange.org](mailto:shanti@directingchange.org). For educational resources including short videos, fact sheets, lesson plans, discussion guides and activities visit:

[www.directingchange.org](http://www.directingchange.org)