



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
School Psychologists

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Mr. Ted Sarandos
Chief Content Director
Netflix
100 Winchester Circle
Los Gatos, CA 95032

Dear Mr. Sarandos:

The 10 organizations signing this letter represent more than 130,000 thousand professionals working with children and youth to support their mental wellness, safety, and successful learning. Our members work in schools, community clinics, and private practice in every community in the country. They serve on the front lines every day to help kids navigate and overcome their challenges to thrive in all aspects of life.

We are writing on their behalf to ask that you seriously consider our concerns when producing the second season of *13 Reasons Why* and consider adding additional safeguards to the first season such as additional warning cards at the beginning and end of every episode. We understand the second season is in production but hope our input can help shape any future filming and post-production. The first season's intense, dramatized handling of difficult issues, in particular youth suicide, generated both widespread popularity among your target audience of adolescents and widespread concern from parents, educators, and mental health experts about potential contagion of harmful behaviors. (See attached, "[13 Reasons Why: Guidance for Educators](#)" and "[13 Reasons Why: Support for Families and Educators](#)".)

We all recognize that suicide is a serious public health issue facing our nation today and there is no single cause of suicide. "The causes of suicide are complex and determined by multiple combinations of factors, such as mental illness, substance abuse, painful losses, exposure to violence, and social isolation" (SAMHSA, 2015). We fully support a stated goal for the series: the need for forthright discussions among youth and between youth and adults about the serious issues represented. However, there is a responsible way to do this, which requires both providing the scaffolding for supportive engagement and minimizing harmful triggers.

Research shows that exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of death, can be one of the factors that youth struggling with mental health conditions cite as a reason they contemplated or attempted suicide. Unfortunately, concern about increased risks associated with viewing *13 Reasons Why* is validated by [recent research published in JAMA](#), the suicide deaths of two California teenagers earlier this summer, and reports received by some of our organizations of heightened suicide ideation or attempted suicide among children or adolescents who cited watching the series as a contributing factor.

We appreciate that Netflix is an entertainment leader with the primary purpose of creating unique content that engages as large an audience as possible. However, along with this ability to connect so powerfully and immediately with viewers, particularly young viewers, comes a responsibility to do no harm. The storylines

elevated at the end of season one and announced as centerpieces of the second season raise serious concerns.

Primary among our concerns are:

1. The glamorization of suicidal/homicidal thoughts in Tyler's story, leading to a potential school shooting. Just as suicide prevention best practice is to never show the "how to" of a suicide attempt, highlighting the evolving thinking and behavior of someone who plans or executes a high profile mass killing is shown to inspire copycat behavior in at-risk individuals. Many school shootings were perpetrated by persons who appeared to have carefully studied prior shootings. Persons who commit these acts do not suddenly snap. There is typically a clear progression of violence and many associated opportunities to intervene. ***We urge you to avoid detailed focus on Tyler's suicidal/homicidal thoughts or acts and instead show how even just one person can intervene to get Tyler help.***
2. The absence of any focus on mental illness. In the first season, Hannah's mental health is never addressed (although the character you created, in our opinion, clearly suffered from both posttraumatic stress disorder and depression). The most common factor in suicide is the presence of a treatable mental illness such as depression or extreme anxiety, combined with intolerable stressors. Suicides are preventable with timely interventions and treatment. Ignoring this critical factor undermines the very important message that mental health problems are treatable and help is available. ***We urge you to address the role of mental illness directly in the storyline and to include warning cards with helplines at the beginning and end of each and every episode. Failure to do so will increase the distress of vulnerable youth who watch the series, and will be a missed opportunity to support those youth in need.***
3. Creating a story arc that presents a catastrophic decision like suicide or homicide as somehow a justifiable or only course of action to deal with what are temporary, albeit very painful, problems. Such storylines, including the concept of revenge suicide, may contribute to the potential for your viewers to carry out suicide with similar intent. We know the storyline comes from the book, but the power of television (combined with the potential to binge watch the series) makes this impression even more impactful, misleading, and harmful. ***We urge you to give the characters other pathways to dealing with their pain and other more responsible means by which individuals are held accountable for their actions.***
4. The absence of effective, engaged, helping adults. Adults in season one are almost uniformly portrayed as clueless, disengaged, or uninterested in what Hannah and her peers are experiencing. They are not sources of support or help even when they are trying. While this may be true of *some* adults, it is not true of most adults. Parents, educators, and mental health professionals are sources of support, and young people need to know that they can get help. Reinforcing the narrative that "adults just don't get it" or "adults don't care" is harmful and may validate decisions to avoid help-seeking behaviors among youth. ***We urge you to incorporate at least some adult characters that the young characters can trust or learn to trust and go to for help.***
5. The helpless, hopeless depiction of adolescence. Lots of extremely painful things happened to Hannah and her classmates in season one. There are few positive actions taken by anyone to intervene, speak up, or offer help. This reinforces the idea that young people are both "in it on their own" and almost powerless to stop harmful behaviors. This not only undermines a sense of empowerment for teens, it also contributes to the seeming inevitability of Hannah's choice, which again, is not a solution or justifiable choice. ***We urge you to provide opportunities in which at least some characters stand up to or say something about unacceptable behaviors like bullying, slut shaming, or sexual assault, and take action to help.***

6. The lack of a focus on protective factors and resiliency. The positive impact and influence that even one caring adult can have in helping youth overcome challenges has been documented by decades of careful study (this aligns with concern #4). Resilience can be built through trusting relationships, linking youth with positive role models, and offering encouragement and reassurance. In addition, adults can help to empower youth to increase confidence in their own personal strengths and abilities, effectively manage strong feelings and impulses, and effectively solve problems. ***We urge you to integrate a focus on protective factors and resiliency. Focusing on resilience in the second season is critical to empowering youth to facilitate a safe and caring culture.***

As noted, we support shining a light on serious issues that schools, parents, and teenagers need to confront. Honest conversations about these issues and resiliency that lead to changed behavior are critical. We also believe in the power of giving adolescents a voice in leading these conversations as long as adults are involved to help offer appropriate perspective and support. The initiative of staff and students at Oxford High School to create “[13 Reasons Why NOT](#)” is a great example of such a thoughtful, positive approach.

Entertainment media can make real contributions to the way society views and engages with real issues. You have a powerful voice, often used to great good. How the issues are presented matters, though, and it is very important to think seriously about unintended consequences of choices made for entertainment value.

We urge you to seek input from a variety of mental health and education experts who work with children and adolescents and in schools. These experts can serve not only to help create a more accurate and realistic depiction of the issues, but also one that will serve the greater good of promoting mental wellness and resiliency. We, the authors of this letter, are more than willing to help you identify such experts.

We look forward to hearing from you. Please contact National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Director of Communications, Kathy Cowan, at 301-347-1665 or kcowan@naspsweb.org and she will make the necessary connections.

Sincerely,

American School Counselor Association
American Dance Therapy Association
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of Secondary School Principals
School Social Workers Association of America
Society of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology

CC: Brian Yorkey
Selena Gomez

Encl.

Sent via email as well