



conversations on the fringe

LEADER'S GUIDE

Netflix Series: *Thirteen Reasons Why* Discussion Guide

Congratulations! If you're reading this, chances are you're trying to be proactive and create dialogue around the new Netflix series, *Thirteen Reason Why*. You might be feeling a little overwhelmed or uneducated since this is dealing with teen suicide. You might even be feeling a little scandalous since the series is chock full of blush-worthy and/or offensive content such as sex, rape, sexting, illegal drugs, underage drinking, cutting, LGBTQ issues, locker room nakedness, and let's not forget to mention the very loose and easily-flow-off-the-tongue use of the F-bomb, among lots of other colorful words. You might be thinking the church has no business promoting the series. But the reality is: youth who aren't watching or at the very least talking about it are definitely among the minority. In fact, it's been reported and verified that teens are so into this series, they are watching it on their smartphones walking from one class to their next. They are watching it at lunch and in study hall.

See, the church or your youth ministry doesn't have to promote the series. It's already well known in and among peer groups of kids in middle and high school. Yes, that means your 13 year old is probably already tracking. The church does have a responsibility, however, in helping its members (old and young alike) draw closer to Jesus in every aspect of their life. We have a responsibility, therefore, in making sure our youth are digesting the truths in the series in a way that helps them gain insight toward how they are called to behave and respond to the world around them. Additionally, the series, though raw, gritty, provocative, and at times hyperbolic, is very realistic and not far fetched in the least. The themes and issues depicted in the series are common and normal...just ask your high schoolers (if you dare). So why shouldn't the church be talking about this?

There are real concerns about watching. The series might trigger negative feelings in youth who are already depressed or have or are experiencing sexual assault, rape, self harm, etc. Be aware of unhealthy dynamics between young women and young men in your group. Perhaps breaking the conversation up by age or gender might be needed if appropriate behavior and/or maturity of the group is in question. Communicating with parents/caregivers is essential. It may also be prudent to contact a local therapist/counselor and establish a referral process for a student that self-discloses any of the above issues.

Please use these discussion guides to get your students talking and to help them know the church is a resource for them. Help remind them that the church is there, not to judge them, but to be there for them in good times and in bad times.

A note about the book:

<http://conversationsonthefringe.com>

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The book by Jay Asher is equally fantastic. However, for the sake of these lessons, we are not going to be talking about the nuances in the book vs the nuances in the series. We will simply be discussing the series, so comparisons between the two should be avoided. There are subtle changes/differences between the two, so know that this guide isn't comprehensive of both.

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Each discussion guide will be broken down into the following flow:

Invocation: We believe in the power of prayer and inviting the Spirit to be among us. Before you dive in, have one person in the group or the entire group read the invocation together.

Background: This section outlines a brief background and the setting of the episode. It will often list key characters.

What Did You Notice?

- What jumped out at you?
- What connected with you?
- What were your initial thoughts/feelings about this episode?

This section is always the same. We like asking the teens share their overall perspectives at the front end of the conversation. Limit this to 15 or so minutes since the majority of the time spent together should be conversations around the talking point questions.

Did You Catch It?: This section will just highlight a few things that might be missed unless you've watched the episode more than once. This shouldn't take up too much conversation time, but much of the things listed might give students better perspective and insight into the conversations throughout the entire series.

Talking Points: Be sensitive to the fact that this is a discussion guide, not a teaching guide. These questions are to get the kids talking, not necessarily to make a point you're trying to teach. Be mindful of how much you are talking in relationship to how much the youth are talking. Sit back and listen. Be encouraging. But don't sabotage their conversation with too many of your own thoughts.

Quotable Quotes: We will try to incorporate three to four thought-provoking quotes from the episode. Just read the quote, and ask students what they think is important about each quote.

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Sometimes the quotes are foreshadowing. Other times they are just meant to get the kids thinking and talking.

Invitation/Response/Orthopraxy: This section is the part where we will live in the tension of what we know and what we do. The talking points are reflective of the episode itself. This section is the part where the students reflect what the episode actually means in their own life and how the truths shared in the episode intersect with their own experiences.

Biblical Intersections: In this section, we will share a handful of short Bible verses. Read them together and ask the students to share in their own words what the scripture means to them. Most of the time, the scripture will be about similar themes/issues that were in in the episode.

The More You Know (Educational/Resources): We want you and students to be informed about why all this matters. We will share articles, data, research, etc. to keep you better resourced.

Extra Reflection: If time allows, we might include an extra exercise for you to consider or ask youth to do on their own time.

Benediction: We'll always end each lesson with another prayer, charging the youth to take what they've learned to strive to live a more faithful life.

Some may wonder how the discussions should be facilitated. There are a number of ways you can use the guide. Most youth will have already seen the entire series. Some may not have seen it at all. Others may decide to watch it as you go along. The discussion guide was written with the understanding that all 13 episodes have already been watched. However, the second time an episode is watched, even more comes to light. With that in mind, you might choose to ask students to watch or rewatch the episode you'll be discussing before coming to your gathering. Or, you might decide to show it to the group, then discuss it afterward. There isn't a rule. The discussion guide contains enough material for 45-60 minutes worth of conversation. In the event you show the episodes, it might be wise to budget two hours.

Regardless of how you choose to facilitate the conversations, it would be wise to hold a parent meeting. Perhaps your church isn't ready to show the series to students. Maybe, instead, you host 13 gatherings with parents of children and youth and discuss it with them. Maybe your church can better help moms and dads have these conversations with their children. At the very least, though, we'd encourage you to talk with parents before going down this path of engaging students in the very needed conversation about suicide and all the other themes the church often shies away from.

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Chris and Melissa are here to help. Feel free to be in touch with either of them if you would like any guidance or support in bringing this to your church. We're happy to serve.

You can reach Chris at cschaffner@fringeconversations.com and Melissa at melissa.rau@ministryarchitects.com.

Visit <http://conversationsonthefringe.com> for more information on these issues and others related to adolescents.

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