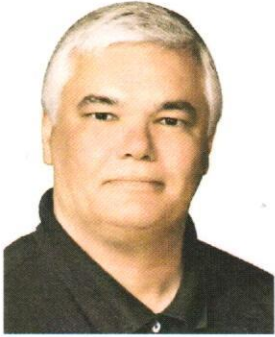


Daniel L. Gardner: We need to talk about teen suicide

Daniel L. Gardner, Contributing Columnist Published 10:27 a.m. CT May 1, 2017 | Updated 20 hours ago



(Photo: Special to The Clarion-Ledger)

People just can't wrap their minds around some things happening today.

In America, 5,000 teens are predicted to take their own lives this year. Let that sink in. Even more startling: Netflix is showing "13 Reasons Why," a series aimed at teens that glorifies suicide.

According to [an article on "TODAY Parents" website \(http://www.today.com/parents/13-reasons-why-psychiatrist-calls-netflix-pull-series-t110934\)](http://www.today.com/parents/13-reasons-why-psychiatrist-calls-netflix-pull-series-t110934), "The original series depicts a fictional high school student who leaves behind a trail of tapes revealing 13 reasons — including bullying, underage drinking and sexual assault — that her character says led her to kill herself."

I have friends who lost their teenage son to suicide years ago. News of teens taking their lives sucks all the wind out of most of us. All of us mourn the loss of a child.

According to Dr. Harold S. Koplewicz, president of the Child Mind Institute who was interviewed for the TODAY Parents piece, "The show ('13 Reasons Why') should be pulled off the air immediately.... Teenage suicide is contagious. We know for over three decades that when kids watch television where they depict a suicide, they're more likely to attempt and they're more likely to actually (kill themselves)."

Koplewicz counsels all parents of teens to have a family conversation about suicide, explaining that suicide is not a solution to problems. In fact, he counsels them to have old fashioned sit-around-the-table-and-talk conversations with their children. How sad it is to have to say this or write this.

Koplewicz said, "Mental health conversations should be brought up at a Friday night or a Sunday dinner — a family conversation — and not once; it's an ongoing dialogue. The conversation is that mental health disorders are real, common and very treatable."

He continued, "The 'Speak Up For Kids' campaign features celebrities like [Emma Stone talking \(https://speakupforkids.org/story/emma-stone/\)](https://speakupforkids.org/story/emma-stone/) about their personal mental health challenges."

Then he suggested, "You can say: 'If someone like that (Emma Stone) could suffer, get help and do better, that means we should all think about the fact that our brain is also an organ and it can be affected and therefore we need to get help. There's nothing to be ashamed about, in the same way we're not ashamed about having kidney problems or heart problems.'"

As difficult as it is to think about a teen or anyone who attempts or completes taking his or her own life and the absolutely devastating mourning of family and friends left behind, I am completely unable to fathom why Netflix would air this series. This has nothing to do with freedom of speech. This has everything to do with protecting lives of some of our most vulnerable friends and families.

Raising children today is much more difficult due to all the influences surrounding us. Social media and digital communication have overwhelmed traditional conversation and communication. Young people today need all the help adults can provide for them, particularly teachers, coaches, parents and family.

Parents and families need all the help we can give them. The traditional structure and values of American families have changed at best and deteriorated at worst, particularly over the past 20 to 25 years. Nowadays "identity groups" have become more important than families to many young people still struggling to find their way.

Americans have become polarized over way too many issues. It's time to return to the kitchen table and have genuine, respectful, and loving family conversations the old-fashioned way.

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