



# 13 Reasons to Fly

A film presented by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health

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Produced and Directed by  
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**MG**  
PRODUCTIONS

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## CAUTION:



This video contains images and information that may be upsetting to viewers. Please inform those who watch this video before viewing it and offer an opportunity to discuss it before they become distressed.



# 13 Reasons to Fly

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# Overview



The film you are about to watch, *13 Reasons to Fly*, is an educational video providing information about youth suicide and the stigma of mental illness. It also offers suggestions about what youth can do to think differently, accept themselves for who they are, reject the stigma of mental illness, and decide to choose a path of positivity by focusing on the good things in their lives.





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# Description



Isabelle Cole,  
Age 17

This film is the result of the efforts of many people who came together to embrace this message and share it with others. This film discusses the thinking of a brave young woman, Isabelle (Belle) Cole, who rejected the glorification of suicide and the stigma of mental illness. Instead, she created, *13 Reasons to Fly*, a Peer-to-Peer initiative that embraces life, positivity, self-acceptance, and recovery from mental illness. *13 Reasons to Fly* directly challenges the solution of suicide portrayed in *13 Reasons Why*. Belle's determination to embrace the best of herself and life with her peers was the inspiration for this DVD. *Thank you, Belle!*





# Video Participants

This fifteen-minute video includes: Belle, youth at Cohannet Academy (an intensive treatment program) who helped to launch *13 Reasons to Fly*, youth on a soccer team in a public high school who adopted *13 Reasons to Fly*, and a Peer Mentor from the Nan Project, which is a Peer to Peer effort to help support young people struggling with depression and suicide.

The participants illustrate that suicide and mental illness affect people we know, people we may see every day, and that recovery is possible. They also show us that having supportive friends and family can make all the difference and ...

“It’s OK to not be OK –  
there is help and there is hope!”





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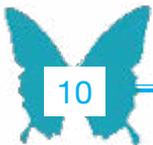
# Intended Audience



*13 Reasons to Fly* is for adolescents and young adults who may live at home, residential schools, treatment programs, secure care programs, or hospitals.

It is also for staff members at all levels in organizations that serve youth/young adults, including but not limited to: direct care staff, clinicians, teachers, and administrators. Families may also benefit from watching the video. However, the film is not for young children who may find the idea of self-harm frightening and overwhelming.

Please consider this when you show this film.





# Purpose

1. To make people aware of the importance of Peer-to-Peer support when youth are struggling with suicide, mental illness, and stigma
2. To identify the key resources to help someone recover from suicidality and mental illness
3. To start a conversation about the reasons to live, embrace positivity, and recognize the power of friends and family to help
4. To reassure people with suicidality and mental illness – you are not alone, help is available, and recovery happens every day
5. To remember that stigma can stop recovery and be very harmful
6. To realize how the entertainment industry and the media can hurt people who are suffering by distorting mental illness and glamorizing suicidality





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# Discussion Points



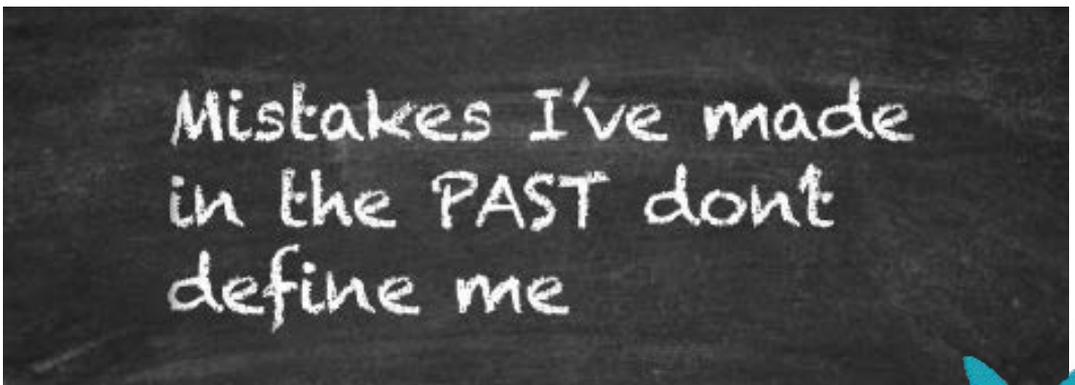
The goal in watching this video is for the viewer to: watch, learn, discuss, and think about suicide, mental illness and the stigma of mental illness differently – particularly from the perspectives of youth. The hope is that those who watch this DVD will learn how critically important it is to dispel the myths of suicide, burst the stigma of mental illness, start conversations, promote positivity, find support from family and friends, and use resources that are available. The best way to do this is to watch this DVD, have a conversation, write down your **13 Reasons to Fly**, and remember the resources if you know someone in need.





# A beginning discussion: Some questions to consider

1. In the film, Belle tells her story of despair, suicidality, and mental illness. She was outraged at the glorification of pain, death and suffering in **13 Reasons Why**. Does it make you feel the same way? Please share your thoughts.
2. In the film, Belle gave a personal message to the entertainment industry and media about people with mental illness. She said, ***“Depict us as people - not as a diagnostic category.”*** Do you think the entertainment industry and media portray people with mental illness differently? If so, how?
3. Both Mike and Belle talked about their mental illness and what helped them get better. What did they identify as important to their healing and recovery?



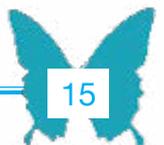


4. Supportive, helping relationships require effective communication. Do you think the staff in your organization or treatment program communicate well? Do they convey support, kindness, and acceptance? If not, what can you do to improve it?
5. The participants in the film discussed the power of Peer-to-Peer work and support. Do you agree? How is Peer-to-Peer support different than support from adults?
6. After watching the film, what was your reaction to the opinions and information discussed by the participants?
  - Did any of the information surprise you?
  - Has this video changed how you think about mental illness or suicide?
  - What would you do if one of your loved ones was diagnosed with a mental illness or was contemplating suicide?





7. Although ***13 Reasons to Fly*** focuses primarily on mental illness and suicide with youth, do you think the key tools for recovery (treatment, family/friends, support) would be the same or different for adults? If different, how so?
8. What are two things that you can do differently today/this week when you return to your work or treatment setting to help prevent the stigma of mental illness and suicide?
9. What are two things that your organization or treatment setting could do over the next month to help prevent the stigma of mental illness and suicide? Are there any obstacle and barriers?
10. What are your ***13 Reasons to Fly***? Write them down and start a conversation!





# Another discussion: Some myths and facts about suicide

## ▶▶ MYTH

Talking about suicide is a bad idea and can be interpreted as encouragement.

## ▶▶ FACT

Given the widespread **stigma** around suicide, most people who are contemplating suicide do not know who to speak to. Rather than encouraging suicidal behavior, talking openly can give a person other options or the time to rethink his/her decision, thereby preventing suicide.

***13RTF-Belle and her peers in the video identify some of the avenues they took to recovery and to avoid self-harm. Which ones do you recall?***





***13RTF-Belle acknowledged her own reluctance about coming forward with her personal story of struggle with suicidal thoughts and self-harm behaviors. What do you suppose is behind the STIGMA around suicide and mental health issues and what can be done about it?***

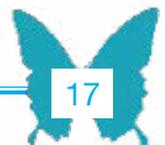
#### ▶▶ MYTH

People who talk about suicide do not mean to do it.

#### ▶▶ FACT

People who talk about suicide may be reaching out for help or support. A significant number of people contemplating suicide are experiencing anxiety, depression and hopelessness and may feel that there is no other option.

***13RTF-Mike, Belle & Kate spoke openly about their experiences with anxiety, depression and hopelessness. Each of them was aware of resources available to them for help and support at their lowest points. Would you know where to turn for help or support for yourself or someone else who is contemplating suicide?***





## MYTH

Someone who is suicidal is determined to die.

## FACT

On the contrary, suicidal people are often ambivalent about living or dying. Someone may act impulsively by drinking pesticide, for instance, and die a few days later, even though they would have liked to live on. Access to emotional support at the right time can prevent suicide.

***13RTF-Belle, the youth featured and the professionals included in the video talk about treatment and the importance of emotional support at the point of crisis. Can you identify someone you'd turn to in the event you or someone you cared about was thinking about suicide or self-harm?***

## MYTH

Most suicides happen suddenly without warning.

## FACT

The majority of suicides have been preceded by warning signs, whether verbal or behavioral. Of course, some suicides occur without warning. But it is important to understand what the warning signs are and look out for them.





***13RTF-During her residential treatment experience at Cohannet, Belle recognized some signs of impending danger of self-harm “one particularly dark day”. She was familiar with her own triggers and had immediate access to clinical resources in that treatment setting. Rather than act on the thoughts (self-harm), she “began writing down reasons to live”...the genesis of her 13 RTF initiative. How does one become familiar with the warning signs (with self or others) and how does when one respond to such signs?***

## ▶▶ MYTH

Only people with mental illness are suicidal.

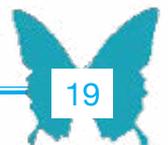
## ▶▶ FACT

Suicidal behavior indicates deep unhappiness but not necessarily mental illness. Many people living with mental disorders are not affected by suicidal behavior, and not all people who take their own lives have a mental disorder.

***13 RTF touches on mental health issues affecting young people. What else would you like to have a better understanding about when it comes to mental health issues affecting young people?***

***Which of these topics are included in 13 RTF? Can you give an example from the video to support your claim?***

- Promote social justice and human rights
- Combat stereotypes, untruths, and half-truths
- Convey a message of hope
- Inspire conversation and new ways of thinking





## MYTH

Suicide is a way to cope with problems.

## FACT

Suicide is not a constructive means of coping with problems, nor is it the only possible way to manage severe distress or to deal with adverse life circumstances. **Stories about individuals with a personal experience of suicidal thoughts who managed to cope with their difficult life situations can help to highlight viable options for others who might currently be contemplating suicidal behavior.** Suicide also has a devastating impact on family members, friends and entire communities, often leaving them wondering whether there were signs they may have missed, and feeling guilty, angry, stigmatized and/or abandoned. Discussions about suicide that explore some of these complex dynamics in a sensitive way, without blaming grieving survivors, can help educate the public about the need to provide appropriate support to persons bereaved by suicide.





***In the video 13RTF, The NAN Project Peer Mentor Coordinator, Mike, related one family’s response to their loved one’s suicide. Mike reflected on some of the complexity of his own history of depression and suicidal thinking. His involvement with The NAN Project emboldened him to gain a better understanding of his own history and use that information to empower his peers. Could you envision calling upon the services offered by The NAN Project in your school or community?***

Belle and her peers participated in ***13 Reasons to Fly*** with the hope that you will share a story that is authentic, with courage and conviction. Would you consider hosting a meeting with your peers and displaying YOUR ***13 Reasons to Fly*** using the butterfly or kite activities?





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# Resources

For more information about *13 Reasons to Fly* (DVDs, Discussion Guides):

[Janice.Lebel@massmail.state.ma.us](mailto:Janice.Lebel@massmail.state.ma.us)

If you are interested in more information about *13 Reasons to Fly* or starting your own 13 Reasons to Fly Chapter, contact Isabelle Cole: [www.13reasonstofly.com](http://www.13reasonstofly.com)

For more information about the Nan Project (peer mentors/school outreach): [www.thenanproject.org](http://www.thenanproject.org)

If you need help and want to talk to someone, call:  
Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

For the Crisis Text Line, text “Listen” to 741-741  
Samaritans, Call or Text: (877) 870-4673  
Depression Hotline: (630) 482-9696  
Hopeline: 919-231-4525 or 1-877-235-4525  
National Domestic Violence / Sexual Abuse: (800) 799-7233  
If you are in immediate danger, please call 911

Society of the Prevention of Teen Suicide: [www.sptsusa.org](http://www.sptsusa.org)  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)  
Active Minds: [www.activeminds.org](http://www.activeminds.org)  
Question, Persuade, Refer: [www.qprinstitute.com](http://www.qprinstitute.com)





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# Acknowledgements

With gratitude to those who appear in the film. Especially

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Kate P.  
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Kyonna T.

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David Melpignano

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# 13 Reasons to Fly

1. **Even if everyone else has left you, I am going to stay.**  
I love you, and I care.
2. **Opportunities are waiting for you;** chances are waiting to be taken.
3. **There are years and years to fix everything.** You never know what things will look like in five years.
4. **It's time to find your passion!** Try out new things and see what you like!
5. **People are waiting for you to inspire them, befriend them, and teach them.**
6. **All your cells are fighting for you** and sacrificing themselves every day to keep you alive. Don't leave them behind!
7. **There are people in your life that love you,** even if it doesn't feel like it.
8. **It gets better,** it can't stay dark forever.
9. **You are so much more than what you're facing right now-** you are infinitely complex and that is beautiful- your story isn't over yet.
10. **You are not weak.** Your strength comes from accepting you are not okay and that is okay.
11. **Everything happens for a reason.** You may not see it right now, but what you're going through now has a purpose.
12. **You are a work in progress.** You are a work of art; always changing.
13. **You are enough.** No matter what you think or what others may say, your worth is infinite and can't be taken away.

**By Isabelle Cole**