

Frequently Asked Questions

Ryan's Story Presentation by John Halligan

About the Presentation

What is Ryan's Story Presentation?

Ryan's Story is a powerful 60-minute bullying and suicide prevention presentation designed for students in grades 5-12. Through the authentic story of Ryan Patrick Halligan, who died by suicide at age 13 in 2003 due to bullying and cyberbullying, students learn about empathy, accountability, forgiveness, and the life-or-death importance of kindness. Since 2005, John Halligan has visited over 2,500 schools and reached more than one million students across the US, Canada, and Latin America.

Is the same presentation delivered to all grade levels?

Yes. The presentation content is identical for 5th-6th graders through high school seniors. The story and its messages about kindness, mental health awareness, and bystander intervention are universally relevant and age-appropriate for all middle and high school students.

Safety & Mental Health Concerns

Will this presentation trigger students who are already struggling with suicidal thoughts?

The presentation is designed with safety protocols aligned with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). It intentionally avoids graphic content, detailed methods, and romanticizing or sensationalizing suicide.

School counselors and mental health staff are always present during the presentation. Pre-presentation materials help prepare students, and post-presentation materials help them process the story and its core messages. The focus is on prevention, empathy, healthy coping strategies, and connecting students with trusted adults.

What if a student becomes emotionally overwhelmed during the assembly?

School counselors and administrators are present throughout the presentation and can quietly escort any student who needs support to a safe space. The presentation is delivered in partnership with your school's mental health team, ensuring immediate support is available. John has delivered this presentation to over 2,500 schools with established protocols to ensure student safety.

What happens if students approach John with urgent mental health concerns after the presentation?

This has never happened. But if a student approached with urgent mental health or crisis need after presentation, John would immediately bring a school administrator and counselor to take over their care.

Content & Approach

Does the presentation align with best practices for suicide prevention?

Yes. The program aligns with current guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Association of

School Psychologists. These organizations caution against suicide-prevention programs that rely on graphic content, detailed methods, or sensationalized storytelling.

Ryan's Story intentionally avoids all of that. There is no graphic material, no instructional detail, and no romanticizing or oversimplifying suicide. The focus is prevention through empathy, bullying awareness, healthy coping strategies, speaking up, and identifying trusted adults when someone is struggling.

What do students learn from this presentation?

Students learn: - How forgiveness can be healing - Why self-advocacy and advocating for others can prevent tragedy - How to move from being a bystander to an upstander - When and how to speak up and apologize when it matters - The importance of recognizing warning signs of depression and suicidal thinking - How their words, actions, and silence affect others

Most importantly, students leave with a message they need to hear: you matter, you are valued, you are not alone, and you are loved beyond belief.

How is this different from other bullying prevention programs?

This is the only school assembly program built on the authentic, unfiltered story of a father who lost his son to bullying-related suicide. Rather than preaching or relying on statistics, John creates lasting emotional impact through vulnerability and personal connection. The presentation challenges students to look inward and reflect honestly on how they treat others, delivered with raw emotional honesty balanced by hope and practical guidance.

Implementation & Support

What support materials are provided?

Comprehensive pre- and post-presentation materials are available at <https://www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org/documents-for-schools>. These include: - Pre-presentation classroom materials to prepare students - Post-presentation discussion guides and worksheets (including the "4321 question" worksheet) - Resources for educators and counselors to continue conversations - Thank you letter templates for students

What happens after John leaves? How do we sustain the impact?

The presentation is designed to complement your existing prevention programs, not stand alone. The post-presentation materials help you continue the conversation and reinforce the lessons. Many schools report lasting behavior changes, with former students reaching out years later—sometimes 10-16 years after the presentation—to share how Ryan's story changed their lives or even saved them.

How do we prepare teachers and staff who might have their own trauma related to bullying or suicide?

It's recommended that school leadership brief staff before the presentation, acknowledging that Ryan's story may evoke personal emotions. Teachers and staff should know they can step out if needed and that counseling support is available to them as well. The presentation is delivered with compassion and focuses on healing and prevention, not sensationalism.

Parent & Community Engagement

How do I explain this presentation to parents who might worry it's too heavy for their child?

The presentation is age-appropriate and has been carefully developed over 20+ years

with input from mental health professionals. It focuses on kindness, empathy, accountability, and speaking up—not on graphic details.

A detailed description is available so parents can understand the content and approach. Many parents have shared that it opened critical conversations with their children about mental health, compassion, and the importance of speaking up. However, I recommend allowing parents to opt their child out if they are still concerned,

Is there a presentation for parents?

Yes. A 60-minute parent presentation titled “Ryan’s Story / A Father’s Hard-Earned Lessons About Cyberbullying and Suicide” is available as a pre-recorded virtual video. It shares lessons learned from the Halligan family’s tragedy, addresses the latest social media problems facing preteens and teens, and provides practical recommendations for parents to prevent suicide and bullying. Parents receive an unambiguous message about taking responsibility for how their children use technology and interact with peers.

What if parents opt their child out of the assembly?

Parents have the right to opt their child out, and schools should communicate the presentation’s purpose and content in advance. For students who do not attend, schools can provide alternative programming or share key messages through classroom discussions using the post-presentation materials. The pre-recorded parent presentation is also available so families can engage with the content together at home.

Logistics & Booking

How much does this cost, and what’s included in the fee?

Pricing information is available on the website under “Speaking Fee” at <https://www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org/fees>. The fee includes: - 60-minute student assembly - Access to all pre- and post-presentation materials - Coordination support - No deposit required - No cancellation fee

How quickly can we schedule a presentation?

John is available every school day from August 15 to June 15. If a day is open on his schedule, he can often arrange a presentation within a week. Contact him directly to find an available date that works for your school.

Can we customize the presentation for our specific school culture or recent incidents?

While the core story of Ryan remains consistent across all presentations, the message is universally applicable to any school culture. The presentation addresses bullying, cyberbullying, mental health, forgiveness, and bystander intervention—issues relevant to every middle and high school.

If your school has experienced a recent crisis, it’s important to discuss timing with John to ensure the presentation supports, rather than overwhelms, your community.

What if we’re a small school with a limited budget? Can we partner with nearby schools?

Absolutely. Many schools coordinate with neighboring districts to bring John to multiple schools in the same region on consecutive days, which can reduce travel costs and make the presentation more affordable. Reach out to discuss logistics—John’s schedule is designed to maximize efficiency when schools are geographically close.

Do schools need any specific training or certification to book the presentation?

No. Schools do not need any specific training or certification to book the presentation.

However, it's recommended that school counselors and mental health staff are present and prepared to support students before, during, and after the assembly.

Credibility & Impact

What are John Halligan's credentials?

John Halligan has: - Delivered presentations to over 2,500 schools since 2005 - Reached more than one million students across the US, Canada, and Latin America - Appeared on national television (The Oprah Winfrey Show, Primetime with Diane Sawyer, PBS Frontline) - Spoken at the United Nations Cyberhate Seminar (2009) - Received the FBI Director's Community Service Award - Received The Learning Channel Give a Little Award - Spearheaded Vermont's Bully Prevention Law (ACT 117, 2004) - Advocated for Vermont's mandatory suicide prevention education law (ACT 114, 2006) - Published two books about Ryan's story (2019)

What kind of impact does this presentation have?

The impact is profound and lasting. Testimonials from former students show that Ryan's story stays with them for years—even decades—after the presentation:

- Students who were contemplating suicide have credited the presentation with saving their lives
- Former students, now adults and parents themselves, still remember the core messages
- Schools report immediate shifts in culture, with students crossing social boundaries to show kindness
- Educators describe it as "the best presentation for students" they've experienced in decades of teaching

One former student wrote 14 years later: "Your assembly saved my life and helped me see the bright side of life. And I never forgot your words, 'You can always turn an ink blot into a butterfly.'"

Contact Information

How do I book John Halligan?

Contact John directly: - Email: johnhalligan@ryansstory.org - Phone: 802-578-8229 - Website: <https://www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org>

Find an available date that works for your school and makes sense with John's travel schedule. He will work with you to coordinate all details.

Ryan's Story Presentation LLC

Dedicated to preventing bullying, cyberbullying, and teen suicide through the power of authentic storytelling