

Ryan's Story

A Father's Hard-Earned
Lessons



December 18, 1989 - October 7, 2003

Our Journey Tonight

- Ryan's Story – The truth of what happened
- What I Missed – Lessons learned the hardest way
- Understanding the Landscape – Bullying, cyberbullying, and today's risks
- What You Can Do – Practical steps starting tonight
- Hope & Healing – Where we go from here



What I Missed

I underestimated emotional bullying

- Thought “sticks and stones” – words seemed less dangerous than physical violence
- Didn't realize relational cruelty could be just as devastating
- The truth: Emotional wounds can cut deeper and last longer

What I Missed

I left social media unmonitored

- Trusted Ryan's online world without looking
- Didn't know what was happening in instant messages and chat rooms
- The truth: The cruelest bullying happened where I couldn't see it

What I Missed

No secret passwords rule

- Not really a “miss”
- Used one agreed upon password for all accounts
- Ended up allowing discoveries after his death

What I Missed

He had no adults to turn to besides us

- We were his only trusted resources
- When he couldn't talk to us, he had nowhere to go
- The truth: Kids need multiple safe adults in their corner

What I Missed

Gave a pep talk when professional help needed

- Thought encouragement and toughening up would be enough
- Didn't recognize the signs of clinical depression
- The truth: Love alone cannot cure mental illness

What I Missed

Those wristbands were hiding something

- Didn't question why he wore them constantly
- Missed the warning sign right in front of me
- The truth: They hide the cuts from you

Understanding Bullying

Definition: A repeated act intended to intimidate, humiliate, or ridicule another person

Three Methods:

- Physical – Hitting, pushing, damaging property
- Emotional – Name-calling, threats, humiliation
- Relational – Exclusion, rumor-spreading, reputation destruction

Understanding Bullying

The Power Imbalance:

Bullying exploits an advantage in size, popularity, social status, or numbers

Three Roles in Every Situation:

- The Bully – The aggressor
- The Bullied – The target
- The Bystander – The witness who can become an up-stander

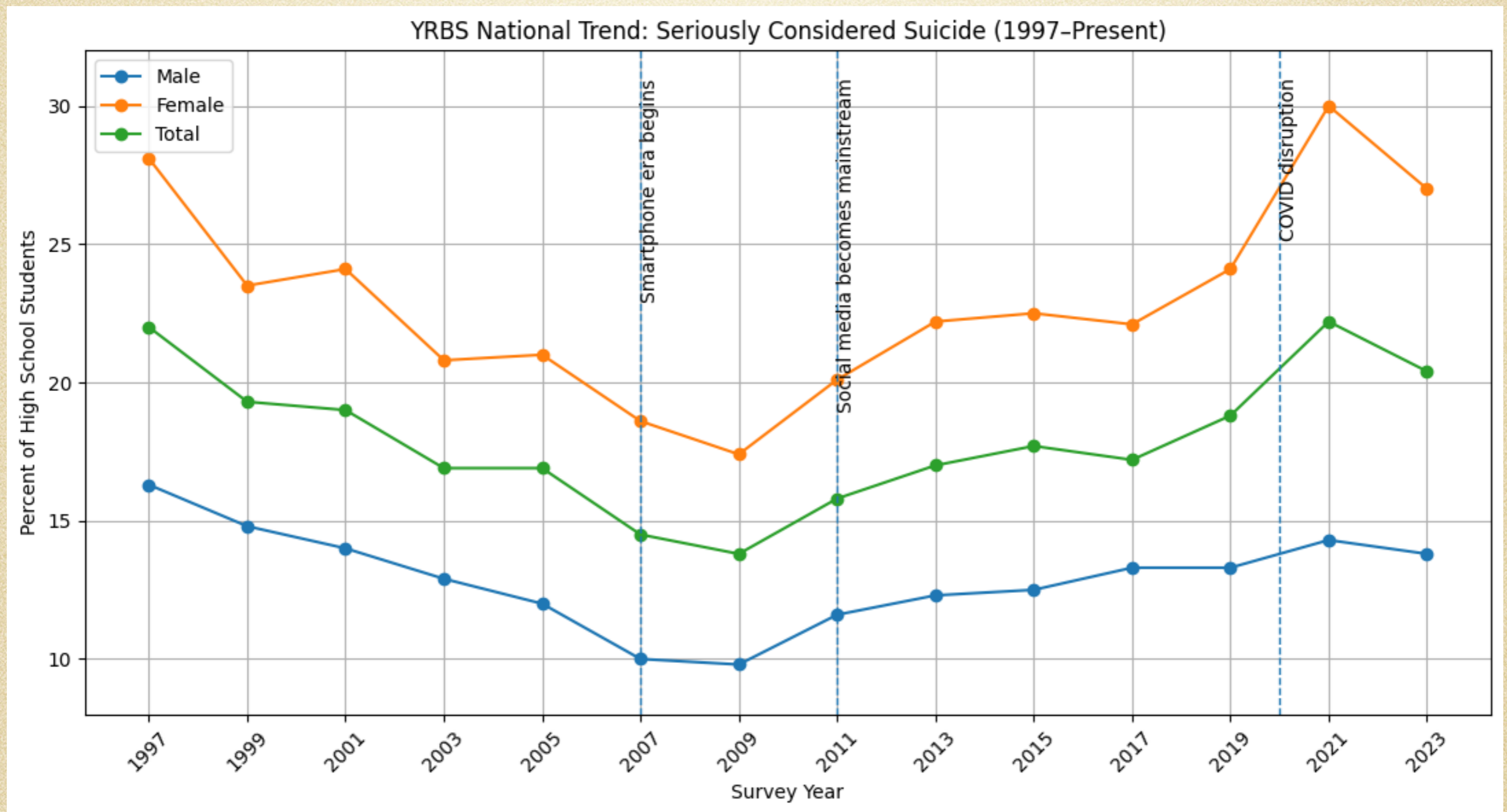
Cyberbullying

Definition: Bullying through the use of technology – texts, social media, apps, gaming platforms

Why It's More Dangerous:

- Often anonymous – No accountability, emboldened cruelty
- 24/7 access – No escape, even at home
- Permanent record – Screenshots live forever
- Wider audience – Humiliation goes viral instantly
- Constantly evolving – New apps and platforms emerge constantly

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Trends



What You Can Do: Practical Steps Starting Tonight

1. Delay, Delay, Delay

- Every year you wait is a year of brain development, maturity, and resilience
- The longer you delay smartphones and social media, the better

What You Can Do

2. Consider an Apple watch or wearable device as a first step

- Allows communication and safety tracking
- No social media, no web browser, no unsupervised access

What You Can Do

3. Create a smartphone use agreement

- Before they get the device, set clear expectations in writing
- Include screen time limits, app approval, and consequences
- Make it a contract you both sign

What You Can Do

4. No secret passwords and no secret passcodes - EVER!

- Privacy is not the same as secrecy
- You have the right and responsibility to monitor their digital life
- If they change it without telling you, the device goes away

What You Can Do

5. Use Apple's screen time or Android Equivalent

- Set daily time limits by app category
- Block apps during homework, meals, and bedtime
- Require approval for new app downloads
- Review their screen time report together weekly

What You Can Do

6. Consider maturity, not just age

- A 13-year-old's brain is not ready for social media - even if the platform allows it
- Ask yourself: Can my child handle rejection, exclusion, and cruelty without me there?
- If the answer is no, they're not ready

Hope and Healing

The One Common Thread:

- In every story of youth suicide told to me, there is one constant factor I uncovered by the question, “How would you describe your child?”

Hope and Healing

What happened to the boy and the girl?

- Forgiveness Was My Only Option
- Holding onto anger and blame was destroying me
- Forgiveness didn't excuse what happened – it freed me to heal

Hope and Healing

It's Never Too Late

- If you've already given your child a smartphone or social media access, you can change course
- New rules, new agreements, new conversations – starting tonight
- Your child may push back, but they need you to be the parent, not the friend

Resources & Support

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741741

Ryan's Story Website:

[https://www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org/
resources](https://www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org/resources)

