# Ryan's Story

## Student Presentation Overview for Parents

Grades 5-12 • John Halligan • 60 minutes

## About the presentation

Your child's school has scheduled Ryan's Story, an educational assembly about bullying, cyberbullying, mental health and help-seeking. John Halligan has shared the program with more than one million students and over 2,500 schools since 2005.

**Plan for 60 minutes total:** personal storytelling followed by guided discussion and reflection. Student arrival and dismissal require additional time.

## The story behind the message

In 2003, John lost his 13-year-old son, Ryan, to suicide. He shares his family's experience, including bullying, cyberbullying and depression, with a focus on hope, connection and asking for help. Suicide is complex and is not caused by a single event.

John's advocacy helped advance Vermont's Bully Prevention Law (Act 117, 2004) and suicide-prevention education law (Act 114, 2006). He continues to work with schools and families on these issues.

## What students can expect

• Personal storytelling from a father's perspective, with age-appropriate content for grades 5-12.

• Reflection on empathy, kindness, accountability, forgiveness and supporting peers.

• Practical encouragement to move from bystander to upstander and involve trusted adults.

• Discussion of mental health and suicide focused on hope and help-seeking, without graphic imagery or descriptions of suicide methods.

## Core messages your child will hear

• Words and actions matter, both online and in person.

• Each of us can help build a more supportive school community.

• Speak up about bullying and seek help for yourself or a friend.

• You matter, you are not alone, and you are 'loved beyond belief'.

# Continuing the conversation

## Part of a broader school effort

The assembly complements a school's ongoing prevention and student-support work. It is not mental-health treatment or a substitute for assessment by a qualified professional. Schools receive preparation and follow-up materials; families can ask their school about its support arrangements and whom to contact with concerns.

## Personal experiences and evaluation context

Students, families and educators have shared personal reflections on the program. These testimonials describe individual experiences; they are not evidence that one assembly prevents suicide or guarantees lasting behavior change.

A September 2011 formative evaluation examined the broader UpStanders initiative, which included John's presentations at ten Florida middle schools and four community events. Its audience feedback and observations do not establish long-term suicide-prevention outcomes for a single assembly. Read the evaluation and its context.

## Supporting your child

• Ask what your child heard, what stood out and how they felt. Listen without judgment.

• Let them know they can come to you with concerns about bullying, mental health or a friend.

• Discuss practical ways to support a peer and involve a trusted adult.

• If you are concerned about suicide, ask directly and seek help from a qualified mental-health professional. Do not ask your child to manage a peer's safety alone.

• Remind them that seeking help is a sign of strength.

## About John Halligan

John has appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show, Primetime with Diane Sawyer and PBS Frontline. He spoke at the United Nations Cyberhate Seminar in 2009 and has received the FBI Director's Community Service Award and The Learning Channel Give a Little Award. He has published two books about Ryan's story.

## Resources and contact

Educator planning and follow-up materials • Support and prevention resources
John Halligan: johnhalligan@ryansstory.org • 802-578-8229
www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org

**Need help now?** In the U.S., call or text **988** for mental-health or suicide-crisis support. For immediate danger or a medical emergency, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency department.