

Ryan's Story

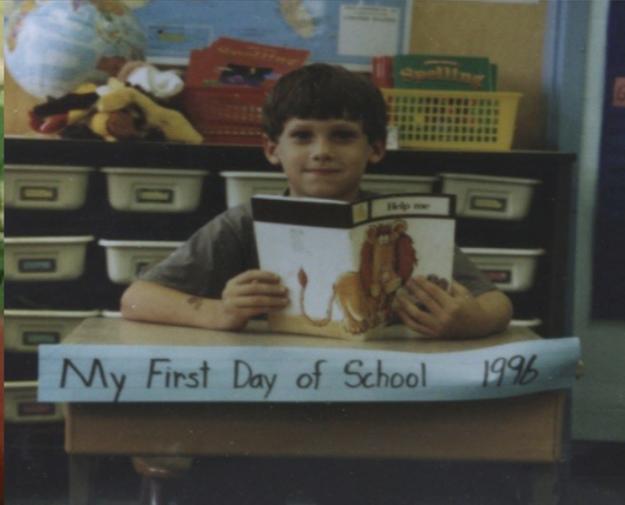
A Father's Hard Earned
Lessons



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

- Actually not 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 He Needed Professional Help

- 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

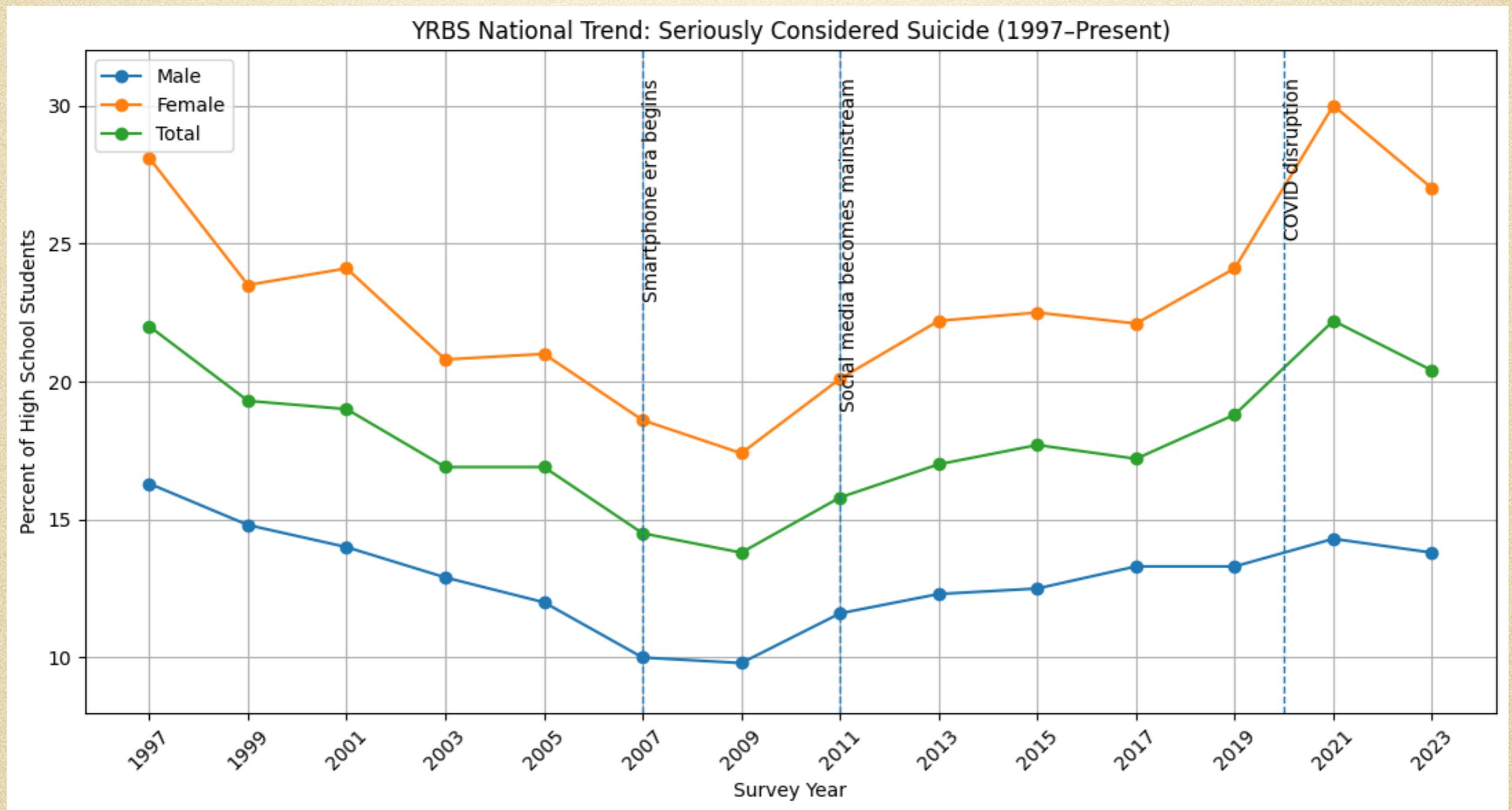
Why It's More Dangerous:

- 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

The Reality:

Your child's online world is where the most damage can happen and where you have the least visibility.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Trends



Youth Risk Behavior Survey Trends

Current YRBS data showing increases in: Persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness among teens - Seriously considered suicide - Made a suicide plan - Attempted suicide

What the Numbers Tell Us:

- Teen mental health is in crisis
- The trends are worsening, not improving
- Girls are especially vulnerable, but boys are at high risk too

Your child is growing up in the most mentally challenging environment any generation has faced.

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
- There is no emergency that requires a child to have a smartphone

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
- Buys you time while keeping connection

What You Can Do: (continued)

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

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: (continued)

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

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

What You Can Do: (continued)

7. Build a Network of Trusted Adults

- Identify at least 2-3 other adults your child can talk to
- Coaches, teachers, school counselors, relatives, youth group leaders
- Make sure your child knows: "If you can't talk to me, please talk to them"

8. Watch for Warning Signs

- Sudden changes in behavior, mood, or appearance
- Withdrawal from friends and activities they used to love
- Secretiveness about phone or computer use
- Sleep problems, appetite changes, declining grades
- New accessories that hide the body (wristbands, long sleeves in summer)

What You Can Do: (continued)

9. Talk About Hard Things

- Don't wait for a crisis to talk about bullying, depression, and suicide
- Asking about suicide does not plant the idea – it opens the door to help
- Let them know: “No matter what, I want to know. I will not overreact. We will figure it out together.”

10. If You're Worried, Get Professional Help

- Trust your gut – if something feels wrong, it probably is
- A pep talk is not a substitute for therapy
- Depression is a medical condition, not a character flaw
- School counselors, pediatricians, and therapists are there to help

What You Can Do: (continued)

11. Teach Them They Are Loved Beyond Belief

- Say it out loud, often
- Show it through presence, not just presents
- Let them know: “Nothing you could do or say would ever make me stop loving you”

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

How 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
- If we want God to have mercy on our souls, he will ask “Did you forgive those who trespassed against you?”

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)