



Student Matinee with Special Pricing February 25, 2026 at 10:00 AM

Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre

280 Miracle Mile

Coral Gables, FL 33134

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# CAST OF CHARACTERS

FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF BOOK WRITER STEVEN LEVENSON

**Evan Hansen (17)** Smart, sincere, and cripplingly self-conscious, Evan prefers to hover in the background, a supporting player in his own life, too afraid to step forward into the spotlight and risk ridicule or, what might be worse, no one noticing him at all.

**Heidi Hansen (40s)** Evan's mother. Overworked and stretched too thin, Heidi loves her son fiercely, but fears they have begun to grow apart. She is prepared to do anything to repair the damage.

**Zoe Murphy (16)** Sensitive and sophisticated, Zoe couldn't care less about the status games and popularity rites of high school. Funny and bright, she feels a terrible ambivalence about her brother's death, finding it difficult to forgive him for all he did, and forgive the part of herself that finds relief in the fact that he's gone.

**Connor Murphy (17)** An angry, disaffected loner, Connor has been a troubled kid for as long as anyone can remember, an enigma and a source of endless consternation to his long-suffering parents and sister.

**Cynthia Murphy (40s)** Connor and Zoe's mother. To Evan, she seems to be the perfect mother, nurturing, available, and willing to talk about anything. To her own children, it's a bit more complicated.

**Larry Murphy (40s)** Connor and Zoe's father. Though often tense and taciturn, Larry shows a different face to the world, representing for Evan the dad he always wished for: strong, confident, and, more than anything, reliable, someone to be counted on.

**Jared Kleinman (17)** Droll and sarcastic, Jared claims to be forced by his parents to hang out with family friend Evan, for whom he ostensibly has nothing but disdain. Jared covers his own obvious insecurities with a well-practiced braggadocio and a know-it-all arrogance.

**Alana Beck (17)** Alana is an incredibly genuine person. Everything she does comes from a place of deep honesty and tremendous feeling. All of the characters in this musical put up masks of sorts. For Alana, it's a façade of cheerfulness. She is always ready with a smile, a note of encouragement. This hides the loneliness underneath.

# MUSICAL NUMBERS

## ACT I

"Anybody Have a Map?" . . . . . Heidi, Cynthia  
 "Waving Through a Window" . . . . . Evan, Company  
 "For Forever" . . . . . Evan  
 "Sincerely, Me" . . . . . Connor, Evan, Jared  
 "Requiem." . . . . . Zoe, Larry, Cynthia  
 "If I Could Tell Her" . . . . . Evan, Zoe  
 "Disappear" . . . . . Connor, Evan, Alana,  
 Jared, Cynthia, Larry,  
 Zoe  
 "You Will Be Found" . . . . . Evan, Company

## ACT II

"Sincerely, Me" (Reprise) . . . . . Connor, Jared  
 "To Break in a Glove" . . . . . Larry, Evan  
 "Only Us" . . . . . Zoe, Evan  
 "Good for You" . . . . . Heidi, Alana,  
 Jared, Evan  
 "You Will Be Found" . . . . . Company  
 (Reprise)  
 "Words Fail" . . . . . Evan  
 "So Big/So Small" . . . . . Heidi  
 "Finale" . . . . . Company

To listen to the *Dear Evan Hansen* Original Broadway Cast Recording, explore character-inspired playlists and more, visit the Dear Evan Hansen [artist profile on Spotify](#). Have you created a show-inspired playlist of your own? Share it with us @DearEvanHansen.

## IN CONVERSATION WITH STEVEN LEVENSON



Steven Levenson

Steven Levenson is a celebrated playwright, and a 2017 Tony Award winner for writing the book for *Dear Evan Hansen*.

### ON THE ROLE OF A BOOK WRITER

In the case of the musical, as a book writer, your job in a lot of cases is to support the score and to make sure the most important moments emotionally are happening in song. So, it's a lot of figuring out when to step out of the way, and to make sure that you've laid the ground enough — and not too much — so that those characters can make the leap into song.

### ON CREATING A NEW MUSICAL

In a way, there's a great freedom about [creating an original work]. We are not beholden to any preexisting vision, but with that freedom comes a lot of anxiety — because we can do anything we want. That can be both freeing and terrifying. [As told to *The Washington Times*]

**STEVEN LEVENSON** (Book) Author of *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin* (Roundabout Theatre Company, Outer Critics Circle Award), *Core Values* (Ars Nova, Drama Desk nomination), *Seven Minutes in Heaven* (Colt Coeur), *The Language of Trees* (Roundabout), and the book for *Dear Evan Hansen* (Second Stage; Obie, Outer Critics Circle Awards for Best Musical and Best Book of a Musical; Arena Stage, Helen Hayes Award). His plays are published by Dramatists Play Service and Playscripts. A graduate of Brown University and former artist in residence at Ars Nova, he is a founding member of Colt Coeur and an alumnus of MCC's Playwrights Coalition.

### ON COLLABORATING WITH BENJ PASEK AND JUSTIN PAUL

I think the role of the book writer can be very different things. In this case, since there was no source material, it was really the three of us coming up with this idea together. We started with this idea of "connection" — people's desire and thirst and need for connection. My instinct was to create a story about someone who could not connect in a world that is all about connection and interconnectedness. What does it mean to have a protagonist who is somehow unable to connect? So slowly, *Evan* began to take shape.

It seemed like the best idea was for me to just write the story like it was a play, because we didn't have anything else to go on. So I started writing the first act. Where we had talked about possibly placing songs, I would leave space in the script. I would either have nothing or I would have a long monologue — a soliloquy, really — with a character diving into his thoughts to suggest what was happening emotionally. That's how it all started, with this first draft.

From there, Benj and Justin started writing songs, but there was a lot of back and forth and rewriting. It was an endless dialogue — two steps forward and one step back — because you are building this thing together. It's a little bit chicken and the egg. You have to be constantly making it and remaking it to accommodate one another — always in service to the story.

### ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CHARACTER IN THE SHOW

We knew we wanted to tell a contemporary story that's set today, and we knew that we had to somehow talk about social media. I compare it to *Bye Bye Birdie*, when they're using the telephones in "The Telephone Hour." It's like they're not using the telephones to talk about telephones, they're using them because that's how their world functions. And if we tried to tell our story today without cell phones and social media, there would be a real inauthenticity about the show. And at the same time we wanted to be sure we're using social media as a storytelling device and we were never interested in exploring social media as a theme or as an idea. We always wanted to make sure it was grounded in the story and part of the grammar of the show. [As told to Broadway Direct]

Miami Native Stephen Christopher Anthony - who starred as Evan Hansen on Broadway - is coming home to Actors' Playhouse to direct this Regional Premiere of *Dear Evan Hansen*!

SPECIAL  
NOTE  
ABOUT  
OUR  
DIRECTOR!



Stephen began his career as a young actor right here at Actors' Playhouse!



# COMPOSING WITH PASEK & PAUL



Benj Pasek and Justin Paul

**This Tony Award-winning pair have worked together as a dynamic musical duo since their college days – a partnership that has taken them to Broadway, Hollywood, and beyond. At the same time that they were developing *Dear Evan Hansen*, Pasek and Paul were also writing lyrics for the award-winning film *La La Land*, which earned them a Golden Globe® and Academy Award® for Best Original Song.**

**Here, the two talk about how their collaboration began and how they brought their original musical to life.**

**BENJ PASEK AND JUSTIN PAUL** (*Music and Lyrics*) are the Tony, Oscar and Golden Globe-winning songwriting team behind *Dear Evan Hansen*. Other Broadway: *A Christmas Story, The Musical* (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle nominations). Off-Broadway: *Dear Evan Hansen* (Second Stage; Obie Award, Drama Desk Award, Outer Critics Circle Award); *Dogfight* (Second Stage; Lucille Lortel Award and Drama League, Outer Critics Circle, London Evening Standard Award nominations). Regional: *James and the Giant Peach* (Seattle Children's Theatre) and *Edges* (Capital Repertory Theatre). Film: *The Greatest Showman, La La Land, Trolls, Snow White*. Television: "Smash," "The Flash." Additional honors: Richard Rodgers Award for Musical Theatre (American Academy of Arts and Letters), ASCAP Richard Rodgers New Horizons Award, Jonathan Larson Award. Both are graduates of the University of Michigan Musical Theatre Program and members of the Dramatists Guild of America, Inc.

**How did you become a composing team?**

**BP:** We both went to the University of Michigan for musical theater. We went there to be actors. For a lot of people who love the theater, when you're young, acting is your way in. But halfway through school we realized maybe we're not cut out to be performers.... After many failed attempts to get good roles in our school shows, we saw the writing on the wall and thought, "Why don't we write our own show, and see what we can make of that?" [As told to *Metro Weekly*]

**JP:** We just started doing it for fun. We were freshmen in college when we began tinkering. It was fun to develop songs thinking from characters' perspectives. We decided to string some of these songs together and make a song cycle our sophomore year. People were receptive. I think before we even knew what was happening we had begun a collaboration. [As told to *Metro Weekly*]

**Tell us a bit about how the idea for *Dear Evan Hansen* originated. I understand that it was born out of your own high school experience.**

**JP:** We noticed certain things about our culture ... some things that were fascinating about the modern response to tragedy and loss. We became very interested in the world's response to loss. And how people grieve and also communicate in the era of social media.

**JP:** It made us think about our desire to connect, and our desire to be a part of something larger than ourselves. Despite our great connectedness through Facebook and Twitter and all of these social media platforms, despite being as connected as we've ever been as a society ...

**BP:** We're more isolated than ever. All of us, teenagers and adults alike.

**JP:** And so we wanted to use that as the backdrop of our story, but we're telling it through the specific story of a family. This family is looking for that kind of connection, and in losing someone they love, they try to fill that void.

## ACTIVITY

## ANALYZE CHOICES

## MAKING CHOICES

Every protagonist makes choices that inform his or her journey — and sometimes the journey of others. Some are proactive choices, others reactive. Some are carefully considered, others impulsive. Some are clear cut, but more often than not, debatable.

## DISCUSS:

Discuss Evan's choices throughout the musical and in particular his decision to lie to the Murphy family about having known Connor. How does the lie begin? How does it change? What is Evan's motivation? How does his choice impact the Murphys? Evan's mom? His fellow students? What are the outcomes — both positive and negative? What do you think of Evan's choice?

## WRITE:

**Persuasive Essay:** Is it ever OK to tell a lie?

From a young age, children are taught the negative implications of lying, but as we grow, sometimes our

perspectives shift. We learn that the morality of lying is not always black and white and that perhaps there might be times when it is acceptable — maybe even appropriate — to lie.

Drawing from scenarios in your own life, historical events, or Evan's experience, take a position and make your case. Consider every angle. What might be the benefits and the ramifications? Consider short- and long-term implications.

**Perspective:** Look at it from the other side.

How does it feel to be on the receiving end of a lie? How might each member of the Murphy family feel about what Evan has done? And how about Evan's mom and the added lies he has told her?

Choose a supporting character from the musical. Write a journal entry (or song, if you are feeling ambitious!) in his/her voice, conveying his/her emotions once Evan has revealed the truth.



The original Broadway company of *Dear Evan Hansen*.

**ACTIVITY****CONSIDER MUSIC****MUSIC****Reinvention: Shaping your own personal narrative**

In *Dear Evan Hansen*, Evan — with the help of his friend Jared — “reinvents” Connor through a series of fictitious emails detailing their “friendship.” Through this imagined friendship, Evan also begins to reinvent himself. Together in “Sincerely Me” they sing:

“CAUSE ALL THAT IT TAKES IS A LITTLE REINVENTION  
IT’S EASY TO CHANGE IF YOU GIVE IT YOUR ATTENTION  
ALL YOU GOTTA DO  
IS JUST BELIEVE YOU CAN BE WHO YOU WANNA BE  
SINCERELY, ME”

**DISCUSS:**

Do you think it is possible to “reinvent” yourself — either how you perceive yourself or how others perceive you? How can believing in yourself help to shape your personal narrative?

**ACTIVITY****REFLECT ON SOCIAL MEDIA****Your online self: Is it the real you?**

Some might say that social media sites offer them a place to share more of themselves than they might feel comfortable sharing in real life (IRL). Others might feel pressure to curate the most perfect version of themselves since it’s so publicly on display.

**DISCUSS:** How do you feel? Is the persona you project through social media the real you? Why or why not? Do you behave differently on different forms of social media? Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram — and how about on your Finsta account?

## ACTIVITY

## COMPARE MUSIC &amp; LYRICS

## MUSIC/LYRICS

What role do the songs play in a musical?

Songs have a dramatic function that are an integral part of the storytelling: They help to develop character and/or move the action of the plot forward.

In musicals, it is a general rule that characters break into song when the emotional stakes have become so high

that ordinary speech fails them. Through their songs, the characters can reveal their innermost thoughts, fears, hopes, and dreams, grapple with difficult decisions, and come to important realizations about themselves.

Musical theater lyrics use many poetic devices, including rhythm, rhyme, repetition, figurative language, symbolism, and metaphor.

## LYRIC ANALYSIS

**WRITE:** Read the lyrics of "Waving Through a Window." Write an essay exploring how Pasek and Paul use figurative language to reinforce the isolation and insecurity that Evan feels at the beginning of the musical.

## WAVING THROUGH A WINDOW

I'VE LEARNED TO SLAM ON THE BRAKE  
BEFORE I EVEN TURN THE KEY  
BEFORE I MAKE THE MISTAKE  
BEFORE I LEAD WITH THE WORST OF ME

GIVE THEM NO REASON TO STARE  
NO SLIPPIN' UP IF YOU SLIP AWAY  
SO I GO NOTHIN' TO SHARE  
NO, I GOT NOTHIN' TO SAY

STEP OUT, STEP OUTTA THE SUN  
IF YOU KEEP GETTIN' BURNED  
STEP OUT, STEP OUTTA THE SUN  
BECAUSE YOU'VE LEARNED, BECAUSE YOU'VE LEARNED

ON THE OUTSIDE ALWAYS LOOKIN' IN  
WILL I EVER BE MORE THAN I'VE ALWAYS BEEN?  
'CAUSE I'M TAP-TAP-TAPPIN' ON THE GLASS  
WAVING THROUGH A WINDOW

I TRY TO SPEAK BUT NOBODY CAN HEAR  
SO I WAIT AROUND FOR AN ANSWER TO APPEAR  
WHILE I'M WATCH-WATCH-WATCHIN' PEOPLE PASS  
WAVING THROUGH A WINDOW  
OH  
CAN ANYBODY SEE?  
IS ANYBODY WAVING BACK AT ME?

WE START WITH STARS IN OUR EYES  
WE START BELIEVIN' THAT WE BELONG  
BUT EV'RY SUN DOESN'T RISE  
AND NO ONE TELLS YOU WHERE YOU WENT WRONG

STEP OUT, STEP OUTTA THE SUN  
IF YOU KEEP GETTIN' BURNED  
STEP OUT, STEP OUTTA THE SUN  
BECAUSE YOU'VE LEARNED, BECAUSE YOU'VE LEARNED

ON THE OUTSIDE ALWAYS LOOKIN' IN  
WILL I EVER BE MORE THAN I'VE ALWAYS BEEN?  
'CAUSE I'M TAP-TAP-TAPPIN' ON THE GLASS  
WAVING THROUGH A WINDOW

I TRY TO SPEAK BUT NOBODY CAN HEAR  
SO I WAIT AROUND FOR AN ANSWER TO APPEAR  
WHILE I'M WATCH-WATCH-WATCHIN' PEOPLE PASS  
WAVING THROUGH A WINDOW  
OH  
CAN ANYBODY SEE?  
IS ANYBODY WAVING...?

WHEN YOU'RE FALLIN' IN A FOREST  
AND THERE'S NOBODY AROUND  
DO YOU EVER REALLY CRASH  
OR EVEN MAKE A SOUND? (4X)

DID I EVEN MAKE A SOUND?  
DID I EVEN MAKE A SOUND?  
IT'S LIKE I NEVER MADE A SOUND  
WILL I EVER MAKE A SOUND?

ON THE OUTSIDE ALWAYS LOOKIN' IN  
WILL I EVER BE MORE THAN I'VE ALWAYS BEEN?  
'CAUSE I'M TAP-TAP-TAPPIN' ON THE GLASS  
WAVING THROUGH A WINDOW

I TRY TO SPEAK BUT NOBODY CAN HEAR  
SO I WAIT AROUND FOR AN ANSWER TO APPEAR  
WHILE I'M WATCH-WATCH-WATCHIN' PEOPLE PASS  
WAVING THROUGH A WINDOW  
OH  
CAN ANYBODY SEE?  
IS ANYBODY WAVING BACK AT ME?

IS ANYBODY WAVING  
WAVING  
WAVING  
OH  
OH

## ACTIVITY

## EXAMINE SONGS

## CHARACTER JOURNEY: COMPARING “WAVING THROUGH A WINDOW” AND “YOU WILL BE FOUND”

**WRITE:** Examine the first stanza/chorus of “You Will Be Found,” the finale to Act 1, and compare the lyrics to those in “Waving Through a Window.” Has Evan changed? If so, how? How do Pasek and Paul use the continuity of metaphors and symbolism to show Evan’s emotional journey throughout the first act of the musical? Consider the audiences of each song — to whom is Evan singing?

### YOU WILL BE FOUND

(First stanza and chorus)

HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE NOBODY WAS THERE?  
HAVE YOU EVER FELT FORGOTTEN IN THE MIDDLE OF  
NOWHERE?  
HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE YOU COULD DISAPPEAR?  
LIKE YOU COULD FALL, AND NO ONE WOULD HEAR

SO MAYBE LET THAT FEELING WASH AWAY  
MAYBE THERE’S A REASON TO BELIEVE YOU’LL BE OK  
’CAUSE WHEN YOU DON’T FEEL STRONG ENOUGH TO STAND  
YOU CAN REACH, REACH OUT YOUR HAND

OH, SOMEONE WILL COME RUNNIN’  
AND I KNOW THEY’LL TAKE YOU HOME

EVEN WHEN THE DARK COMES CRASHIN’ THROUGH  
WHEN YOU NEED A FRIEND TO CARRY YOU  
AND WHEN YOU’RE BROKEN ON THE GROUND  
YOU WILL BE FOUND  
SO LET THE SUN COME STREAMIN’ IN  
’CAUSE YOU’LL REACH UP AND YOU’LL RISE AGAIN  
LIFT YOUR HEAD AND LOOK AROUND  
YOU WILL BE FOUND

YOU WILL BE FOUND  
YOU WILL BE FOUND  
YOU WILL BE FOUND  
YOU WILL BE FOUND

Stephen Christopher Anthony as Evan Hansen in the North American touring company of *Dear Evan Hansen*. Photo by Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman, MurphyMade.



## ACTIVITY

## DISCUSS SCENE DIALOGUE

**honesty**

1. a : fairness and straightforwardness of conduct  
b : adherence to the facts : sincerity

Review the final conversation between Evan and Connor at the end of the second act.

**DISCUSS:**

What dramatic conceit does book writer Steven Levenson use to present this conflict? What does this conversation reveal to us?

Have you ever imagined something so hard it almost seemed real? Have you every exaggerated a true story to make it more interesting and eventually you aren't sure what part really happened? Have you ever just not mentioned something and then had to cover it up with other half truths until you were caught up in a series of lies you couldn't escape? What is integrity? Are some lies okay? Why?

**Scene begins**

*Evan, alone.*

EVAN

I'm not doing this. I'm done.

CONNOR

You can't just stop now.

*And Connor is there.*

EVAN

I don't think I can live with this anymore.

CONNOR

What about my parents?

EVAN

No more emails.

CONNOR

How can you do this to them?

EVAN

No more Connor Project. No more orchard.

CONNOR

After everything they've done for you? They need you.

EVAN

Need me for what? To keep lying to them?

CONNOR

That lie is the only thing that's keeping them together.

EVAN

That's not true.

CONNOR

Oh really? They seemed like a pretty happy family when you met them?

EVAN

I don't want to lie anymore.

CONNOR

And what about Zoe?

EVAN

Zoe said, she just ... she wants me.

CONNOR

Right.

EVAN

She likes me for who I am.

CONNOR

Except you didn't happen to mention that everything you've told her, it's all been one big fucking lie, did you?

*Evan says nothing.*

Oh. You left that part out.

EVAN

So then, what if ... what if I did tell her the truth?

CONNOR

She'll hate you.

EVAN

Maybe she would understand. Maybe everyone would understand.

CONNOR

Everyone will hate you.

EVAN

Not if I can just, if I can explain it, you know?

CONNOR

You'll go right back to where you started. No friends.

EVAN

I want to be done/ with this.

CONNOR

/ Nobody. Nothing. Alone.

EVAN

I'm ready to be done with it.

CONNOR

If you really believe that, then why are you standing here, talking to yourself? Again?

*Beat.*

CONNOR (*cont'd*)

You think you're going to turn around all of a sudden and start telling everyone the truth? You can't even tell yourself the truth.

EVAN

What are you talking about?

CONNOR

How did you break your arm?

*A pall comes over Evan.*

How did you break your arm, Evan?

EVAN

I fell.

CONNOR

Really? Is that what happened?

EVAN (*less and less confident*)

I was, I lost my grip and I ... I fell.

CONNOR

Did you fall? Or did you let go?

*Beat. MUSIC IN.*

You can get rid of me whenever you want. You can get rid of all of it. The Connor Project.

The orchard. But then all that you're going to be left with is ... you.

### **For Forever (Reprise)**

CONNOR

END OF MAY OR EARLY JUNE  
THIS PICTURE PERFECT AFTERNOON  
WE SHARE.  
DRIVE THE WINDING COUNTRY ROAD  
GRAB A SCOOP AT "A LA MODE"  
AND THEN WE'RE THERE ...

CONNOR

Think about it.

*Evan stands there for a moment, lost.*

*He makes a decision.*

*Lights shift and Evan and Alana are in their bedrooms, online.*

*Connor is gone.*

## WERE THE CONSEQUENCES FAIR?

After seeing the show, one could argue that Evan doesn't receive appropriate external consequences for his actions. One could also argue Evan had internal consequences and repentance and reformation was achieved, which is the purpose of consequences.

Which argument do you agree with? Back up your opinion with evidence from the show you just saw. Your evidence could include noticeable visual reactions, spoken lines, subtext, lyrics, or even technical affects that caused you to focus on certain things. State your case and convince your classmates the outcome was fair or unfair.

## ACTIVITY

## WRITE TO INSPIRE

## THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

At the beginning of the show, Evan has an assignment: to write an inspirational letter to himself.

"Dear Evan Hansen,  
Today is going to be a great day and here's why ..."

Much has been written about the power of positive thinking, the benefits of an optimistic outlook, and the value of self pep talks. Together these techniques can:

- Relieve stress and anxiety
- Reshape attitudes
- Increase self-esteem
- Influence behavior
- Impact goal achievement
- Improve overall health

**WRITE:** Write an inspirational letter to yourself.

Dear me,

"This is going to be a great [day/week/year] and here's why ..."

What are you most looking forward to? What, if anything, do you hope to achieve? What are the challenges you might face? How will you work to overcome those hurdles?



## LITERARY COMPARISONS

## OUTSIDERS

Literature, both classic and contemporary, is filled with "outsiders" – characters who, like Evan, feel isolated and struggle to connect. Although each character has his/her own unique backstory and challenges, one can find commonalities between them.

**WRITE:** Choose an "outsider" from another book you have read or are currently reading. Write a comparative essay showing the similarities and differences between that character and Evan. How do their emotions/choices/journeys parallel one another and where do they diverge? What impact does each have on other characters in their respective stories?

Some suggested character comparisons.

- Laura from *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams
- Holden Caulfield from *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger
- Charlie from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- Christopher from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon
- Oscar from *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz
- Eleanor from *Eleanor and Park* by Rainbow Rowell
- Aza Holmes in *Turtles All the Way Down* by John Green
- Greg Gaines from *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews

## FLAWED HERO/DECEPTION

Evan is a flawed hero. As a class, discuss the characteristics of a flawed hero. How does the presence of a flawed hero serve the overall storytelling of a fictional work? Why is it important for protagonists to have character flaws? How do authors go about creating protagonists who are likable despite their flaws?

Many times, flawed heroes – like Evan – lie to gain status with others and/or a sense of belonging. Sometimes these lies stem from uncorrected misconceptions or omissions of the truth and grow into greater deceptions. This convention appears not only in literature but also many modern-day films.

**WRITE:** Choose a book/movie you have recently read/seen in which lying/deception is a central theme. Compare it to *Dear Evan Hansen*. How does the lie begin? What are the character's motives and what are results?

Some suggested character comparisons.

- Gatsby from *The Great Gatsby*
- Tom from *The Talented Mr. Ripley*
- Huck from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain
- Olive from *Easy A*

# UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL ANXIETY

SOME INSIGHTS FROM OUR PARTNERS AT THE CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

In *Dear Evan Hansen*, the title character struggles with social interaction and maintaining relationships, isolates himself, and fears being judged by others. Although Evan's specific problem is not named in the play, these are classic signs of social anxiety disorder, a mental health disorder that affects many young people, usually beginning during the early teen years.

Also in the play, the character Connor Murphy takes his own life. Before his suicide, he is depicted as angry, oppositional, and isolated, which may be seen in young people struggling with depression. Self-harm, suicide attempts, and completed suicide are also strongly linked to adolescent mood disorders such as depression.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL ANXIETY?

In the teen years, young people start being more aware of what other people think. There are "right" things to wear, or say, or do — and things that teens *shouldn't* do that could be embarrassing or weird. Some feel so worried about what others are thinking about them that it starts to impact negatively on their everyday lives. This kind of worry is called social anxiety disorder.

Kids with social anxiety disorder aren't just nervous when they are at parties or giving a speech in class. Even answering a question in class can feel extremely scary; some kids worry they will humiliate themselves simply by eating in the school cafeteria or walking into a room. That's because kids with social anxiety fear they might do something embarrassing or offensive, and it will make others judge or reject them.

Similarly, since adolescents are often moody, it can be difficult to recognize when someone has become depressed. The first sign people tend to notice is withdrawal from friends, or when someone stops doing things he/she usually likes to do.

These are some of the most prominent signs of depression in teens:

- Persistent sadness or irritability
- Feeling worthless, or hopeless about the future
- Diminished interest in most activities, especially things they used to enjoy
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Low energy and motivation
- Decline in academic performance
- Decreased ability to think or concentrate
- Thinking about suicide or death

## THE STIGMA OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Many people don't want to believe that young people can have mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. They say that young people with serious mental health problems are just going through regular growing pains. As we see in *Dear Evan Hansen*, the emotional problems that young people face are very real.

# DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

A young person with depression experiences persistent, intense feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and irritability that make it hard to function day to day. We don't know exactly how or why depression develops, but it's not usually caused by bad things happening.

Depression is called an "internalizing disorder," which means that it primarily affects a young person's emotional life rather than their behavior. Because of this, it can take a while for others to recognize it — or for a young person to realize that his/her thinking, and emotional responses, is troubled. Adolescent depression is more common than some people think. According to some statistics, **more than 12 percent of teens ages 15 and 16 struggle with depression. For teens ages 17 and 18 it jumps to more than 15 percent.**

## HOW CAN YOU SPOT SOCIAL ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION?

Young people with social anxiety disorder often think their anxiety is obvious, which can create more anxiety. But, in actuality, other people might not recognize it, because a lot of the symptoms of anxiety are happening under the surface. Panicked thoughts, a racing heart, or an upset stomach aren't apparent from the outside. For other kids, however, anxiety can produce outward signs such as anger or aggression.

Adolescent psychiatric disorders are common (one in five children and teens struggle with a diagnosable disorder), and have real biological and environmental causes. But the denial of these facts leads to struggling teens and their families to feelings of shame and fear of judgment. Millions of children and teens don't seek treatment because of this stigma, but it is vital to be open and ask for help.

## HOW CAN TEENS GET HELP IF THEY ARE ANXIOUS OR DEPRESSED?

Teens who think they need help with an emotional or mental health issue might not know how to ask for help. If they are very anxious, it might be embarrassing for them to admit that things that seem easy for other people are very hard for them. If they are depressed, they may worry that others won't understand and will tell them to "snap out of it" — or that family and friends will be disappointed.

But parents, teachers, and friends can be more sympathetic and less judgmental than teens imagine. First, however, they need to know how a young person is feeling. The sooner a teen asks for help, the sooner they will start feeling better.

# HELP A FRIEND IN NEED



## POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

If you see someone posting distressing content on social media, or if they are behaving dramatically differently than usual, it may signal that this person needs help. If you have a gut feeling that something is not right, you should act on it.

**Be aware of statuses/posts, messages, photos, videos, links, comments, or hashtags that include the following themes:**

- Feeling alone, hopeless, isolated, useless, or a burden to others: "I feel like I'm in a black hole"; "I don't want to get out of bed...ever"; "Leave me alone"; "I can't do anything"
- Showing irritability and hostility that is out of character: "I hate everyone"; "F\*@K the world"
- Showing impulsive behaviors: such as driving recklessly, a significant change in, and especially increase in, substance use, or taking other risks
- Insomnia posts: "3am again and no sleep"
- Withdrawal from everyday activities: "Missed another chem lab — I'm such a waste"; "Another day in bed under the covers"
- Use of negative emoticons: for example, repeatedly using emoticons that suggest someone is feeling down or thinking about using a tool to hurt themselves.
- Use of concerning hashtags: #depressed #lonely #whenimgone #noonecares #suicidal #selfharm #hatemymself #alone #sad #lost #worthless #neverenough #givingup

Currently, when someone searches for a hashtag indicative of self-harm (for example, "#cutting") on Instagram, a content advisory warning pop-up will appear. People have the option to select "Learn More" before viewing any posts.

- Following activity: On either Facebook's News Feed, or Instagram's Following Activity, you can see the accounts and posts people start to follow. If you notice a friend liking or following feeds or posts that promote negative behaviors, even if they aren't sharing concerning content themselves, that may serve as a warning sign that they are engaging with troubling messages or communities.

- Trust your instincts: If you see someone posting messages, photos, videos, links, comments, or hashtags that suggest the person is in emotional distress, you should reach out and get them the help they may need.

I can't handle any of this 😞



# HELP A FRIEND IN NEED



"I've noticed you haven't been yourself lately. Are you okay?"

## HOW TO HELP A FRIEND IN NEED

If you have a friend who seems to be struggling with an issue that may be more serious than they can handle, there is a lot that you can do to support them.

Reach out — pick up the phone, swing by their place, walk with them to do errands, let them know they are not alone in feeling this way and that it's OK to ask for help. Be clear and direct, and do not use hints such as liking a post or replying with an emoticon, as these could be misinterpreted by the person you're trying to help.

Understanding that it can be tough to start this conversation, here are some suggestions on how you can reach out:

– "I'm worried about you because you seem..." (e.g., sad, withdrawn, etc.).

- Have examples ready such as, "It concerned me when you said..." Be specific about what you noticed.
- "Do you want to talk about it?"; "What can I do to help?"
- If they say no, then you might say: "It's OK if you don't want to talk to me, but it is important that you talk to someone."
- Offer to help them connect with support.

**NEVER BE AFRAID TO GIVE YOUR FRIEND A CALL, PAY A VISIT, OR SEND THEM A FACEBOOK MESSAGE TO LET THEM KNOW YOU ARE CONCERNED, AND OFFER TO HELP CONNECT THEM WITH ANY EXTRA SUPPORT NEEDED.**



Post Photo

No one would care if I were gone

Post

## WARNING SIGNS THAT SOMEONE MAY NEED URGENT HELP OR MAY BE AT RISK OF SUICIDE

While it can be hard, particularly on social media, to know if someone is exaggerating, being sarcastic or being serious, if someone threatens to take their own life, you should always take them seriously.

Here are some examples of things someone at risk of suicide might post about:

- Suicide or wanting to die: "I want out"; "Everyone would be better off without me"; "No one would care if I were gone"; "There's no reason to live"
- Intense and urgent emotional despair or intense guilt or shame, feeling trapped: "I can't take it [the pain] anymore"; "There is no way out"; "I'm done"; "I'm so sorry for all the trouble I've caused everyone"
- Rage or seeking revenge: "I'll show you all"; "She'll be sorry"
- Saying goodbyes, giving away personal possessions: "I'll miss you all"; "You won't have to worry about me anymore"
- Glorifying or glamorizing death, or making death seem heroic: "Death is beautiful"
- Where/how to get potentially lethal means, like access to pills or weapons



## National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Crisis Text Line: Text "START" to 741-741

# HOW TO HELP A FRIEND IN URGENT NEED OR WHO MAY BE AT RISK OF SUICIDE

1. If someone is threatening their own life or someone else's life, this is an emergency. If you feel comfortable, you should bring your friend to the emergency room. Or you call 911 or campus emergency services immediately. If it's safe to do so, stay with that person or do what you can to contact them or find someone to stay with them until help arrives.

2. You can use the following free, 24/7 national services any time:

Crisis Text Line: Text "START" to 741-741 or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

### REMEMBER TO:

- Listen without judgment, assumptions, or interruptions. Let them know that you believe what they are saying and take them seriously
- Know your limits and do not place yourself in physical danger — the best way to help is to connect your friend to a mental health professional.

**NO MATTER WHAT, YOU SHOULDN'T BE EMBARRASSED OR WORRIED ABOUT OFFENDING OR UPSETTING YOUR FRIEND. HELPING YOUR FRIEND MAY TAKE SOME COURAGE, BUT IT IS ALWAYS WORTH THE EFFORT TO SUPPORT THEIR HEALTH AND SAFETY.**

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



[jedfoundation.org](http://jedfoundation.org)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND HOW TO HELP YOURSELF OR A FRIEND, VISIT:

[www.jedfoundation.org](http://www.jedfoundation.org)

This guide, while evidence based, is for informational and educational purposes only and is not intended to constitute medical advice or be a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.

## RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS & PARENTS

Dowd, Stephanie Psyd. **"How To Help Your Depressed Teenager."** Child Mind Institute. Childmind.org

Ehmke, Rachel. **"How Using Social Media Affects Teenagers."** Child Mind Institute. Childmind.org

Ehmke, Rachel. **"Tips for Communicating With Your Teen."** Child Mind Institute. Childmind.org

Foster, Brooke Lea. **"Married to Their Smartphones."** NYTimes.com. October 28, 2016.

Green, R. Kay. **"The Social Media Effect: Are You Really Who You Portray Online?"** The Blog, HuffingtonPost.com. August 7, 2013.

Heitner, Devorah. **"Rules for Social Media Created by Kids."** NYTimes.com. January 5, 2017.

Lublin, Nancy. **"How Data From Crisis Text Line Is Saving Lives."** TEDWoman. May 2015,  
CEO and founder of Crisis Text Line, Nancy Lublin is using technology and data to help save lives. Crisis Text Line is free 24/7 support for those in crisis. Text START to 741741 from anywhere in the USA to text with a trained crisis counselor.

McGrath, Keenan. **"Your Facebook Life Doesn't Fool Me."** scarymommy.com

Price, Michael. **"Alone in the Crowd: American Psychology interview with Sherry Turkle."** apa.org. June 2011 Vol. 42, No. 6 (print edition, page 26).

Turkle, Sherry. **"Connected, but Alone?"** TEDTalk. TED.com. April 3, 2012.

As we expect more from technology, do we expect less from each other? Sherry Turkle studies how our devices and online personas are redefining human connection and communication — and asks us to think deeply about the new kinds of connection we want to have.

White, Thomas. **"Why Social Media Isn't Social."** The Blog, HuffingtonPost.com. September 4, 2013.



### EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

<p><b>Framework for 21st Century Learning: Life and Career Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set goals with tangible and intangible success criteria</li> <li>• Set and meet goals, even in the face of obstacles and competing pressure</li> <li>• Understanding preventive physical and mental health measures, including proper diet, nutrition, exercise, risk avoidance, and stress reduction</li> <li>• Use a wide range of idea creation techniques (such as brainstorming)</li> <li>• Elaborate, refine, analyze, and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts</li> <li>• Act on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution to the field in which the innovation will occur.</li> </ul>	<p><b>National Core Arts Standards</b></p> <p><b>VA:Cr1.2.1a:</b> Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.</p> <p><b>VA:Cr1.2.1a:</b> Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan works of art and design.</p> <p><b>MU:Cr2.1.C.1a:</b> Assemble and organize sounds or short musical ideas to create initial expressions of selected experiences, moods, images, or story lines.</p> <p><b>MA:Cr2.1.1:</b> Apply aesthetic criteria in developing, proposing, and refining artistic ideas, plans, prototypes, and production processes for media arts productions and presentation context.</p>	<p><b>FLORIDA LITERACY STANDARDS</b></p> <p><b>LAFS.910.W.1.1</b> supporting claims with valid reasoning and sufficient evidence</p> <p><b>LAFS. 1112.W.1.2)</b> for Grades 11-12 ELA selecting, organizing, and analyzing content, using formatting, transitions, and precise language,</p> <p><b>LAFS.910.W.3.9</b> Provide textual evidence for argument</p> <p><b>LAFS.910.L.3.5</b> Figurative connective meaning and vocabulary in context</p> <p><b>LAFS.910.RL.2.4</b> Word/phrase meaning and word choice</p>	<p><b>NATIONAL THEATRE STANDARDS</b></p> <p><b>Respond (TH:Re):</b> Analyze production elements, understand the purpose and audience of a work, relate artistic ideas to societal/cultural contexts, and use research to understand a play's background.</p> <p><b>Connect (TH:Co):</b> Develop a broader worldview and deeper understanding of personal issues through</p>
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