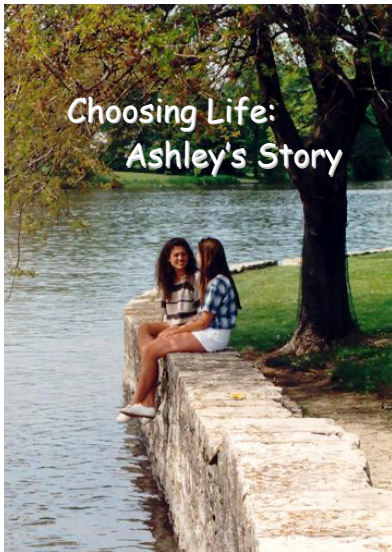


Choosing Life: Ashley's Story

Choosing Life: Ashley's Story is a 15-minute video filmstrip that depicts the story of a teenage girl who attempts suicide. The girl narrates it and it leads the viewer through a sequence of events that begins with her thoughts about her friends and her parents, the suicide of a student in her school, an incident of rejection, her suicide attempt, the reaction to her attempt by her friends and parents and the successful connection she makes with a social worker in the community.

This video is a modification of *Choosing Life: Gail's Story* one of the two videos used in a research study on the effectiveness of the overall program conducted in October 2003. The other video was *Day for Night* produced by DRADA.



Choosing Life: Ashley's Story is available in VHS format for the nominal fee of \$12.00 or in DVD format for \$15.50 from:

Infinite Video Productions
1880 Fabyan Parkway
Batavia, Illinois 60110
630-389-0000
info@infinitevideo.com

Comments from Jerry Ciffone about the movie
Choosing Life: Ashley's Story

Teens like to learn, in story-form, about the activities and thoughts of someone his or her age. Much of what Ashley is talking about in her narration is something that most teen viewers can relate to.

- Wanting to “be cool” or “with it”
- Wanting to be included with their peers
- Conflicts with parents who don’t seem to understand
- Fantasizing what their friends might think of them
- Wanting attention
- Testing out the reaction of their peers
- The struggle to understand themselves

Second, teens also search for novelty and the movie and the follow-up discussion (in [Transcript](#)) provides them with information they don’t expect to receive. Third, scare tactics weaved into many health related messages to teens, are avoided. These three ways of presenting information — in story-form, that is novel, and devoid of the usual scare tactics — are what seem to make the overall presentation message both effective and appreciated.

Students may have an adverse reaction to the attitude and behavior shown by Ashley in the first part of the video (up to the point in which her attitude is challenged by another girl). This negative reaction by the viewer is desirable. Peer pressure to not be like the “old” Ashley seems subtle yet sufficient to discourage such teens who might identify with the “old” Ashley from continuing such behavior and to be more honest in their dealings with their friends. The overall effect on the school environment is that there is less chaos caused by histrionics and more of a focus upon those who are more seriously disturbed and in need of intervention.

JC 4/24/08

Excerpts of the video Choosing Life: Ashley's Story

Scene 5

Ashley:

Maybe that's why my friends were the most important thing in my life. They were my whole world, really. I needed friends to be happy.

So I used to be either real happy, or real depressed. Happy when I felt my friends liked me, and depressed when I felt left out.

And when I was depressed, I usually fantasized about dying. Because people love you more when you're dead, and that's a fact. I know, because of Jake.

Scene 6

Ashley:

Jake was a kid in our school who committed suicide about a month before my attempt.

I used to love going to his gravesite. It was so quiet and peaceful.

Now Jake was nothing special. Kind of an average guy.

I guess he was pretty messed up.

Negative about his life and the future, always getting high, sleeping in school, arguing with lots of people, getting in trouble with his parents and the police.

But you wouldn't believe what happened after his suicide. There was such a fuss!

Lots of people crying at his funeral. Everyone saying what a great kid he was.

It seemed like they loved him so much more after he was dead than while he was still alive.

I suppose all that attention kind of influenced me.

Scene 7

Ashley:

After that, when I was around my friends I'd say things like, "I'm depressed and maybe I'd be better off doing what Jake did."

Nobody took me seriously, though. They even made fun of me after a while.

I was hurt. I thought... "didn't they care about me at all?"

Scene 11

Ashley:

As I walked home I was confused at first. As I thought about it

I started to feel really angry at Tyler and then Jessica. Then I felt angry at everyone, period.

Scene 12

Ashley:

By the time I got home, I thought no one would notice or care if I was dead and gone.

I felt so lonely. I just wanted to die. And all of a sudden I thought, why not?

Then they'd see that I wasn't just trying to get their attention when I said I was depressed. They'd see that I was serious about wanting to kill myself.

Scene 16

Ashley:

I went to school the next day, wrist all bandaged up. I didn't care if they could see it. I wanted my friends to see that I'd really tried it. That I'd meant what I said.

If I expected sympathy or apologies, forget it. No one wanted anything to do with me.

Even Jessica turned away from me, wouldn't look me in the eye. Everyone acted like they were afraid of me.

Scene 17

Ashley:

Everyone except Emily, that is. She was Jake's sister. We'd known each other, but we never talked. She heard the news that I attempted suicide, came to me, asked how I was, how I felt. So I told her exactly what I thought.

I never thought I'd have the willpower to go through with it.

Emily:

Willpower? Is that what you think it was?

Ashley:

What do you think?

Emily:

Either it was just a lot of drama to try to get your friends to feel sorry for you...

or else it was the ultimate cop-out; not being able to face up to your problems and try to solve them.

Either way, it wasn't some act of courage or will power.

She was right.... I'll never forget that day. We ended up spending the whole afternoon just talking.

Emily:

Ashley there is no sensible reason to commit suicide. You know, I still dream about Jake. In my dreams, I'm holding his arms and shaking him and I'm yelling.

I say, "Why did you do it? Look at what you've done to Mom and Dad and me." And he just stares at me. He never says anything, he just stares.

And when I wake up, I realize that he's gone and that nothing was accomplished by his suicide. It was such a senseless thing that he did! It was such a waste!

He didn't solve his problems because he copped-out. If he was trying to teach people a lesson, he'll never know if it worked. Because he's dead. He's gone, forever.

Get some help, Ashley. I don't know what your problems are, but getting help is nothing to be ashamed of.

If Jake would have gotten some help from a counselor...who knows he might still be alive and happy again.

Ashley:

I'm not sure whether it was simply what she said, or because she was Jake's sister. But whatever, I decided I did need help.

Scene 18

Ashley:

I began seeing a social worker at a local clinic; it was what my father had arranged, but I hadn't wanted to go until that point.

It's no heavy analysis or anything like that. We just talk for about an hour, once a week.

By talking to Sarah, I've learned a lot about myself. That my problem wasn't so much that I felt other people didn't like me;

it was that they didn't like my behavior and I behaved that way because I didn't really like myself.

I'm learning to accept the fact that my parents and friends may not love me the way I want to be loved. But that the best I can do is to learn to love myself.

I guess I pretended to be something I wasn't and I thought suicide was the way to deal with my problems. And all that happened was I ended up making a fool of myself.

Scene 19

Ashley:

I owe so much to Emily, for being so blunt with me.

I'm a different person now. I'm learning about who I am and I'm not so afraid to be myself.

It's surprising. As soon as I stopped trying so hard to get people to like me, I started to make some better friends.

I wish I'd never done what I did to myself. But seeing Sarah has given me wisdom.

She's helped me to be a better...and stronger person. I just wish I could have learned all of this some other way...

because I came so close to making the biggest mistake a person can make... killing yourself.

There are ways out of every situation; there's a way to cope with any problem, no matter how bad or hopeless it seems to be.

But you can't find those ways if you're dead. And that's when people would really have a reason to say, "What a waste."

These script excerpts are originally from a suicide prevention video (Choosing Life: Part II) produced by Sunburst Communications in Pleasantville, New York and have been modified by Jerry Ciffone. These excerpts may not be reproduced or distributed without the permission of Jerry Ciffone of School District U-46, Elgin, IL. Copyright © 2008 School District U-46, Elgin, IL.