

From: RSU 71 School Counseling Department
Date: May 1, 2017
To: Parents of RSU 71 students
Subject: Parents: PLEASE READ

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We have become aware that there is a series on Netflix, *13 Reasons Why*, which may be getting your child's attention or the attention of friends of your children. According to the Boston Globe, 'This Netflix series is about a high school student who commits suicide. The show features graphic and intense depiction of rape and suicide. The subject slits her wrists and bleeds to death in a bathtub'.

Our intent is to make all parents aware and provide you with helpful information about this sensitive topic. We do not condone this show, and find it completely inappropriate for younger viewers.

In providing you support as a parent on the subject matter of suicide, we reached out to our Maine associate involved with the National Association on Mental Health/National Association of School Psychologists (NAMI/NASP) to gain some insight on how to handle conversations involving suicide with children.

If you should need further opportunities of support, please do not hesitate to reach out to your child's school

counselor, or school administrator.

We want to use this experience as an opportunity to open the dialogue around this very sensitive topic and the challenges that may be present in our children's lives while modeling the support and care that surrounds each of them.

Here is a portion of what NAMI/NASP offered for information.

Schools have an important role in preventing youth suicide, and being aware of potential risk factors in students' lives is vital to this responsibility. The trending Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, based on a young adult novel of the same name, is raising such concerns. The series revolves around 17-year-old Hannah Baker, who takes her own life and leaves behind audio recordings for 13 people who she says in some way were part of why she killed herself. Each tape recounts painful events in which one or more of the 13 individuals played a role.

Producers for the show say they hope the series can help those who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. However, the series, which many teenagers are binge watching without adult guidance and support, is raising concerns from suicide prevention experts about the potential risks posed by the sensationalized treatment of youth suicide. The series graphically depicts a suicide death and addresses in wrenching detail a number of difficult topics, such as bullying, rape, drunk driving, and slut shaming. The series also highlights the consequences of teenagers witnessing assaults and bullying (i.e., bystanders) and not taking action to address the situation (e.g., not speaking out against the incident, not telling an adult about the incident).

CAUTIONS

We do not recommend that vulnerable youth, especially those who have any degree of suicidal ideation, watch this series. Its powerful storytelling may lead impressionable viewers to romanticize the choices made by the characters and/or develop revenge fantasies. They may easily identify with the experiences portrayed and recognize both the intentional and unintentional effects on the central character. Unfortunately, adult characters in the show, including the second school counselor who inadequately addresses Hannah's pleas for help, do not inspire a sense of trust or ability to help. Hannah's parents are also unaware of the events that lead her suicide death.

While many youth are resilient and capable of differentiating between a TV drama and real life, engaging in thoughtful conversations with them about the show is vital. Doing so presents an opportunity to help them process the issues addressed, consider the consequences of certain choices, and reinforce the message that **suicide is not a solution to problems** and that help is available. **This is particularly important for adolescents who are isolated, struggling, or vulnerable to suggestive images and storylines.** Research shows that exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of death, can be one of the many risk factors that youth struggling with mental health conditions cite as a reason they contemplate or attempt suicide.

GUIDANCE FOR FAMILIES

1. Ask your child if they have heard or seen the series *13 Reasons Why*. While we don't recommend that they be encouraged to view the series, do tell them you want to watch it, with them or to catch up, and discuss their thoughts.
2. If they exhibit any of the warning signs above, don't be afraid to ask if they have thought about suicide or if someone is hurting them. Raising the issue of suicide does not increase the risk or plant the idea. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity to offer

help.

3. Ask your child if they think any of their friends or classmates exhibit warning signs. Talk with them about how to seek help for their friend or classmate. Guide them on how to respond when they see or hear any of the warning signs.

4. Listen to your children's comments without judgment. Doing so requires that you fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said. Put your own agenda aside.

5. Get help from a school-employed or community-based mental health professional if you are concerned for your child's safety or the safety of one of their peers

See Preventing Youth Suicide Brief Facts (also available in Spanish) and Preventing Youth Suicide: Tips for Parents and Educators for additional information.

Here are the links below:

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide>

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/preventing-youth-suicide-tips-for-parents-and-educators>