



Dear Parents/Guardians,

We are writing to share information related to the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*. The series deals with the difficult topic of suicide and schools have an important role in prevention of youth death by suicide. The reason we are bringing this to your attention is we are concerned that many parents may not be aware that their child is viewing this deeply emotional series, which is rated **MA** for mature audiences only.

The Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, and the book this series is based on, may pose a risk to students who are struggling with traumatic and or stressful experiences. The story is of a 17 year-old girl who dies by suicide. She leaves behind cassette tapes for 13 people whose actions she perceives were reasons why she took her own life.

The series is raising concerns from suicide prevention experts about the potential risks. The series graphically depicts a death by suicide and covers a number of topics such as bullying, rape, drunk driving and shaming. It also depicts adults and school staff as unhelpful. Students who hear about, or watch this series may feel confused as a result of how the series addresses those topics. Youth watching the series could interpret the message that suicide is a viable and/or romanticized option.

Series such as this one can lead to misinformation about suicide. Research shows that exposure to real or dramatized stories of suicide can increase risk. You may wish to ask your child if they have heard of or seen this series. 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. Adults can help in sharing the message that suicide is not a solution to problems and that help is always available. We also urge parents to research the series to fully understand what your child is being exposed to.

The following are suggestions which may help with the conversation:

- Remind them that the series is fictional
- Share that it is normal to experience periods of stress and distress. Offer healthy coping strategies (eg: exercise, journaling, talking to friends and adults they trust)
- Let them know there are adults at school who care and can help
- Talk about where to seek support if they need it from family members, counsellors, coaches, teachers, faith leaders, a crisis line such as Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868, etc.
- Talk openly about emotional distress and suicide. Doing so in a fact-based manner does not increase suicide risk
- If you have concerns about your child's mental health, see your family physician and/or share your concerns with the school.



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Possible Signs that someone may be having thoughts of suicide:

- Suicide threats, both direct “I am going to kill myself”, “I need life to stop” and indirect “I need it to stop”, “I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up”. Threats can be verbal or written and are often found in online postings
- Giving away possessions
- Preoccupation with death in conversation, writing, drawing and social media
- Changes in behaviour, appearance/hygiene, thoughts and/or feelings. This can include someone who is typically sad who suddenly becomes extremely happy
- Emotional distress
- Withdrawing from friends and family.

Trust yourself as a parent/guardian. If you feel something is not right with your child or notice any of the signs above, do not hesitate to ask directly about thoughts of suicide. This may be a tough conversation to have but sends a message that you are open to talking about suicide and increase the chances your child will seek help. That may sound like “Sometimes when people are under stress, having trouble with friends and worrying a lot, they have thoughts of suicide. Are you having thoughts of suicide?”

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter. Should you feel the need for more information or support, please contact your child’s principal.

Sincerely,

Nancy Schultz
Superintendent of Student Services
Living Sky School Division