



**NICOLET
HIGH SCHOOL**

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SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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May 3, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information regarding a trending Netflix series, *13 Reasons Why*, based on a young adult novel of the same name. The series follows the story of a 17-year-old student, Hannah Baker who commits suicide and leaves behind audio recordings for thirteen of her peers whom she felt contributed to her death.

The series graphically depicts a suicide death and addresses in detail other serious topics such as bullying, rape, drunk driving, and sexual harassment. While produced with the intention of helping those who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide, the series has concerned mental health advocates and suicide prevention experts. According to a press release from The National Association of School Psychologists, *13 Reasons Why* may send the wrong message to impressionable youth. While the show accurately conveys the many stressors our children face, it misses a critical opportunity to appropriately address mental health issues and how they should be handled. Vulnerable youth, especially those who are socially isolated or struggling may be adversely impacted by viewing such graphic content. Research indicates that exposure to another person's suicide or to graphic or romanticized accounts of death can be one of the risk factors that youth cite as a reason they idealize or attempt suicide. Additionally, the series fails to show how a teen should seek support from an adult if he or she is dealing with these stressors.

While we do not recommend that students be encouraged to watch this show, we recognize the popularity of the series and would like to use this as an opportunity for you to engage your child in meaningful conversation about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. We recommend that you ask your child if he or she has seen this show. Let your child know that suicide is not a solution to their problems and help is always available. We recommend that you listen to your child's thoughts and feelings without judgement. If your child exhibits warning signs, feel free to ask if they have thought about suicide. Engaging your child in a conversation about suicide does not increase their risk or plant the idea of self harm; instead, it creates an opportunity for them to receive help. Please use the attached Talking Points to guide your conversations.

If you have questions or have concerns about your child, please reach out to your child's school counselor or your community-based provider.

Sincerely,

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13 REASONS WHY TALKING POINTS

- 13 Reasons Why is a fictional story based on a widely known novel and is meant to be a cautionary tale.
- You may have similar experiences and thoughts as some of the characters in 13RW. People often identify with characters they see on TV or in movies. However, it is important to remember that there are healthy ways to cope with the topics covered in 13RW and acting on suicidal thoughts is not one of them.
- If you have watched the show and feel like you need support or someone to talk to, reach out. Talk with a friend, family member, a counselor, or therapist. There is always someone who will listen.
- Suicide is not a common response to life's challenges or adversity. The vast majority of people who experience bullying, the death of a friend, or any other adversity described in 13RW do not die by suicide. In fact, most reach out, talk to others and seek help or find other productive ways of coping. They go on to lead healthy, normal lives.
- Suicide is never a heroic or romantic act. Hannah's suicide (although fictional) is a cautionary tale, not meant to appear heroic and should be viewed as a tragedy.
- It is important to know that, in spite of the portrayal of a serious treatment failure in 13RW, there are many treatment options for life challenges, distress and mental illness. Treatment works.
- Suicide affects everyone and everyone can do something to help if they see or hear warning signs that someone is at risk of suicide.
- Talking openly and honestly about emotional distress and suicide is ok. It will not make someone more suicidal or put the idea of suicide in their mind. If you are concerned about someone, ask them about it.
- Knowing how to acknowledge and respond to someone who shares their thoughts of emotional distress or suicide with you is important. Don't judge them or their thoughts. Listen. Be caring and kind. Offer to stay with them. Offer to go with them to get help or to contact a crisis line.
- How the guidance counselor in 13RW responds to Hannah's thoughts of suicide is not appropriate and not typical of most counselors. School counselors are professionals and a trustworthy source for help. If your experience with a school counselor is unhelpful, seek other sources of support such as a crisis line.
- While not everyone will know what to say or have a helpful reaction, there are people who do, so keep trying to find someone who will help you. If someone tells you they are suicidal, take them seriously and get help.
- When you die you do not get to make a movie or talk to people any more. Leaving messages from beyond the grave is a dramatization produced in Hollywood and is not possible in real life.
- Memorializing someone who died by suicide is not a recommended practice. Decorating someone's locker who died by suicide and/or taking selfies in front of such a memorial is not appropriate and does not honor the life of the person who died by suicide.
- Hannah's tapes blame others for her suicide. Suicide is never the fault of survivors of suicide loss. There are resources and support groups for suicide loss survivors.

If you're struggling with thoughts of suicide...

- Text **START** to 741-741
- Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Talking points by:

