

April 28, 2017

To: All Parents/Guardians of Students in the Cowichan Valley School District

**Re: Parent Awareness – “13 Reasons Why”**

Some of you may already be aware of a TV/Netflix series called "13 Reasons Why" currently trending with teens. We felt it important to draw your attention to this as there are numerous concerns from Mental Health Organizations who are stressing the risks and dangers associated with youth watching this series without appropriate adult support and opportunities to debrief the intense content, including the potential risks posed by the sensationalized treatment of youth suicide. We encourage parents to watch the series in order to be able to engage in conversations to help their teens make sense of what they are watching.

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).

The story 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.

Counsellors are noting that teenagers are talking about this program and they have also been seeing an increase in maladaptive ways of coping with pain as a result of watching various episodes.

We know you are influential supports for your teens and you have a pivotal role in diminishing the risks associated with controversial programming such as this by initiating frank discussions.

Also, you can help your teen connect to counselling support and mobilize other mental health resources if your teen is experiencing significant emotional pain.

The fact that many organizations have expressed concerns about teens watching this program alone or unsupported is why we thought it was essential to reach out to parents, if you weren't already aware.

**"13 Reasons Why" Netflix Series: Cautions and Considerations for parents:**

We all share an important role in preventing youth suicide, and being aware of potential risk factors in students' lives is vital to this responsibility.

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

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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 counsellor 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. What the series does accurately convey is that there is no single cause of suicide. Indeed, there are likely as many different pathways to suicide as there are suicide deaths. However, the series does not emphasize that common among most suicide deaths is the presence of treatable mental illnesses. Suicide is not the simple consequence of stressors or coping challenges, but rather, it is most typically a combined result of treatable mental illnesses and overwhelming or intolerable stressors.

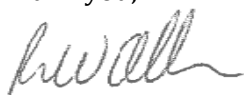
\*Excerpted on April 23/17 from: <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/13-reasons-why-netflix-series-considerations-for-educators>

Please contact community service providers or your school counsellor if you have questions or concerns about your teen and believe that they may need some additional support.

Further contacts and resources available to you and your teen:

- Child & Youth Mental Health Intake Clinic: 250-715-2725, Suite B 161 4th St., Duncan, BC (Tuesdays 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.)
- Community Options Society: 250-748-0232, 554 Trunk Rd., Duncan, BC
- Canadian Mental Health Association: 250-746-5521, 371 Festubert St., Duncan, BC
- Vancouver Island Crisis Line: 1-888-494-3888
- <http://www.viccrisis.ca/>
- 1-800-SUICIDE
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868
- <http://mindcheck.ca/>
- <https://www.anxietybc.ca/>
- <http://keltymentalhealth.ca/>
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education: [www.save.org/blog/tips-watching-new-netflix-series-13-reasons/](http://www.save.org/blog/tips-watching-new-netflix-series-13-reasons/)
- Common Sense Media: [www.common sense media.org/tv-reviews/13-reasons-why](http://www.common sense media.org/tv-reviews/13-reasons-why)

Thank you,



Rod Allen  
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Cowichan Valley School District