



Hopkins Public Schools

"Committed to Quality Education for our Children's Future"

400 CLARK STREET - HOPKINS, MI 49328 - (269) 793-7261 - FAX (888) 557-7919 - www.hpsvikings.org

Dear Parents and Guardians:

This letter is to make you aware of the popular Netflix original series *13 Reasons Why*. In the current miniseries (which is based on a young adult novel released a decade ago written by Jay Asher), high school student Hannah Baker leaves behind 13 tape recordings detailing why she took her own life. Her former classmates are left to piece together Hannah's final weeks in a made-for-television mystery. This series states it was developed to explore suicide, bullying, depression, and anxiety in teens. However, the way the series addresses these issues is complex and may be confusing and/or concerning for impressionable viewers.

In watching the series, young people and teens could interpret the message that suicide is a viable and/or romanticized option. In the series the suicide is graphically depicted and the adults in the series appear disconnected or unwilling to help the adolescents. **Unfortunately, this could lead teens to believe that there would not be anyone that they could talk to in their school or home regarding depression and suicide.**

Please take a moment to find out if your child has read the book or viewed the series. If so, please use this as an opportunity to talk about some of its complicated issues and open the door to create a safe atmosphere for your child to discuss his or her feelings and emotions. We also urge parents to research the series to fully understand what your youth is being exposed to. Attached (and linked) to this letter is a talking points article that has been developed as a useful resource:

<https://www.jedfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/13RW-Talking-Points-JED-SAVE-Netflix.pdf>

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter. As always, we must work together to keep our youth safe, healthy and feeling supported.

Should you feel the need for more information or support, please contact your youth's school counselor. If your child is in crisis and requires immediate assistance, call 911 or Allegan County Community Mental Health Access & Emergency Services at (269) 673-0202 or 1-888-354-0596.

Sincerely,

Allegan County Suicide Prevention Coalition and Hopkins Public Schools.



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 741741
- Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Talking points by:

