



McGRAW CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

West Academy Street

McGraw, New York 13101-0556

“To pursue the maximum fulfillment of each student’s potential”

Melinda McCool

Superintendent

607-836-3636

(Fax) 607-836-3635

email: mmccool@mcgrawschools.org

Dear McGraw Families,

There is currently a Netflix series called **13 Reasons Why**, that has become a topic of concern of parents and teachers. I want to be sure that McGraw families are aware of the potential risks for young adults and children that may be viewing this series.

Recently the **National Association of School Psychologists** had the following to say about the Netflix series **13 Reasons Why**:

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 to 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.

In addition the NASP gives the following guidance for families:

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, 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.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

☐ National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text "START" to 741741

WEBSITES

☐ National Association of School Psychologists, www.nasponline.org

☐ American Association of Suicidology, www.suicidology.org

☐ Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, www.save.org

☐ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, <https://afsp.org/>

☐ www.stopbullying.gov

☐ Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, www.rainn.org

***National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). 13 Reasons Why Netflix series: Considerations for educators [handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

If you ever feel that your child may be suicidal you can bring them to any emergency department for a psychiatric evaluation. The evaluation will not only give you more information as to where your child is at but they can then also help coordinate the services your child may need. You can also call any of these numbers for guidance/information:

Cortland Regional Medical Center Psychiatric Services Hotline – 607-756-3771

Cortland County Mental Health Clinic – 607-758-6100

Family Counseling Services – 607-753-0234

National Suicide Hotline – 1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

Suicide Prevention & Crisis Service Line – 607-272-1616

If you feel your child is in immediate danger you can also call the police at 911 for assistance and guidance.

Melinda McCool
Superintendent