



Dear Ottawa-Carleton District School Board Families:

As you may be aware, recently, Netflix released *13 Reasons Why*, a series based on a novel by Jay Asher. The series depicts the story of a high school student who dies by suicide, leaving behind 13 cassette recordings that share the events that she perceives led to her death. The series is graphic and sensationalizes the act of suicide, which may lead to vulnerable students misinterpreting its message.

Although this series has been promoted by the creators as a tool to help students recognize their impact on others to prevent suicide, it does not address mental illness or present viable alternatives to suicide, including seeking support from mental health professionals. At no point do the actors seek help from family members, friends or other trusted adults.

Series like this one can lead to misconceptions and misinformation about suicide, and possibly to the glamorization of suicide and suicide contagion. For these reasons, mental health professionals across North America, including the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board mental health team, feel it is necessary to make you aware of this series and its troubling content.

While we are unaware of any specific incidents related to this series, we want to let you know that we will continue to do everything we can to support student mental health and well-being needs. As students raise questions about the series, staff will address the content in ways that are sensitive and appropriate, especially with our most vulnerable students.

You may wish to ask your child if they have heard of or seen this series. If your child is watching this or similarly graphic series, we recommend you watch with them and use the opportunity for open discussion. The following are suggestions which may help with the conversation:

- Encourage critical thinking and remind them that the series is fictional and includes many unrealistic elements.
- Remind them that it is normal to experience periods of stress and distress. Offer healthy coping strategies, e.g. exercise, talking to friends, exploring nature. Model this for your children.
- Let them know that school counsellors are professionals and trustworthy and that their depiction in the series wasn't accurate.
- Remind them to always seek support if they need it from family members, counsellors, coaches, teachers, faith leaders, a crisis line like Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868, Mental Health Crisis Line: 613-722-6914 (within Ottawa) or 1-866-996-0991 (outside of Ottawa), Youth Services Bureau Crisis Line: 613-260-2360 (within Ottawa) or 1-877-377-7775 (eastern Ontario), LGBT Youthline: 1-800-268-9688

- Talk openly about emotional distress and suicide. Doing so, doesn't make someone more suicidal or put the idea of suicide in their mind. If you have concerns about your child's mental health, see your family physician and speak to your child's principal or vice-principal right away.
- If the concern is more urgent, call the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: 613-238-3311 or take your child to a hospital emergency department or call 911.
- Take all questions seriously and know that Ottawa-Carleton District School Board staff are here to support you and your family.

As always, if you have individual concerns about your child related to mental health, or need additional resources, please contact your child's school. Thank you for partnering with us to support student mental health and well-being.