

MONSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Cheryl A. Clarke, Superintendent of Schools
Suzanne Morneau, Director of Pupil Personnel Services

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Katherine B. Watts, Director of Curriculum

May 5, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians:

It has come to my attention that Netflix has created a television series based on Jay Asher's 2007 book entitled, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and many of our students are watching or have watched the series since it was released on March 31. The topics covered in this book and series include bullying, alcohol, drugs, rejection, heartbreak, sexual assault, abuse, revenge, depression, physical assault, harassment and suicide. The story provides thirteen reasons related to peers, family and school personnel, justifying the 17-year-old main character, Hannah Baker's ultimate decision to end her life.

Our concern is that our students could possibly perceive that suicide is a viable and/or romanticized option when they are faced with these traumatic struggles in life. The scenes and content are graphic and, in our opinion, not suitable for students in younger grades. In this way, the concepts can be used as a springboard for discussion, awareness of these topics, different ways people react/could react, and how some teenagers are thinking/feeling. It can really hit home the profound effect one can have on another.

However, here are some of the shortcomings of the series:

- There is no mention of mental health and treatment options (in essence, the positive things a person can do to not lead one to contemplate suicide).
- The idea that suicide is romanticized/idealized.
- There are no examples of help-seeking by the teens impacted.
- There are several scenes throughout depicting serious trauma for which the teens do not seek help or resources (rape, bullying, car accidents, fights, alcoholism, depression/suicide).
- The series does not express what to do in harmful situations in terms of getting help or utilizing healthy decision-making or coping skills.
- The series is not meant to be an educational film, and its message does not comply with the health recommendations for treating mental health and/or trauma, or preventing suicide.
- There is a lack of support offered to Hannah by the adults in her life, including the school counselor. Unfortunately, the school counselor in this series is not portrayed in a positive light and may lead some to believe that is how counselors may handle a similar situation.

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The Monson Public Schools provide Equal Educational and Employment Opportunities without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and disability.

If you need assistance translating this document into a language other than English, please contact the district's Coordinator of English Language Learners at 413-267-4150 x 1003.

Si necesita ayuda que traduce este documento en un idioma de otra manera que inglés, contacta por favor Coordinador del distrito de Estudiantes ingleses de Idioma en 413-267-4150 X 1003.

Если Вы нуждаетесь в помощи, переводящей этот документ на язык кроме английского языка, пожалуйста свяжитесь с Координатором района английских Языковых Учеников в 413-267-4150 x 1003.

如果你需要除了英语将这份文件翻译成一种语言的帮助，请在 413-267-4150 x 1003 联系英语学习者的地区的协调人

Please find out if your child has read the book, watched the series on the television or on their smart phone/tablet, or heard about the series. If they have, please talk with them about it. We also suggest that you research the series so you understand what your child may be exposed to. For your reference, there is a list of talking points below to help with these conversations.

You should also know that while this focus is fresh and timely because of the recent release of the series, the school system has a thoughtful, proactive approach to suicide education and mental health challenges. Students in middle and high school receive information in their health classes. Additionally, each fall, sophomores receive a full program discussing and outlining the signs of suicide.

Thank you for your attention to this very important topic. Should you feel you need more information or support, please contact the school personnel listed below.

Sincerely,



Cheryl A. Clarke
Superintendent

Talking Points:

1. Talk to your child and ask him or her if he or she has seen the series *13 Reasons Why*. While we don't recommend that students be encouraged to view the series, do tell your child that you want to watch it with him or her if your child is watching it and that you want to discuss their thoughts. A resource to assist is: http://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/13RW-Talking-Points-Final_v5.pdf
2. If your child is displaying warning signs of suicide (such as but not limited to: making direct threats "I want to kill myself" or indirect threats "I need it to stop," giving away prized possessions, having a preoccupation with death, exhibiting changes in behavior) be direct and ask your child if he or she is thinking of committing suicide. Listen to your child without being judgmental.
3. Ask your child if he or she is concerned about a friend displaying warning signs of suicide and what he or she would do if a friend was at-risk.
4. Get help right away for any individual who is exhibiting concerns. Contact 911 if it is an emergency.
5. It is important to know that there are many treatment options for life challenges, stress and mental illness. Mental illness is treatable. If you feel like you need support or someone to talk to, then please reach out. Talk with a friend, family member or counselor. There is always someone who will listen.
6. Know that supports are available at school. Counselor names and contact information to secure help for your child are below.

Additional Resources:

School:

Quarry Hill – Chelsea Norrie, Adjustment Counselor – 267-4160, norriec@monsonschools.com
Granite Valley – Scott Johnson, Adjustment Counselor – 267-4155, johnsons@monsonschools.com
Monson High – Maria Maloney, Social Worker – 267-4589 x1106, maloneym@monsonschools.com

Phone:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (5673)
Local 24/7 Confidential Hotline: BHN Crisis – 413-733-6661

Online:

Confidential Online-Chat: online.rainn.org
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org)
Suicide Prevention Resource Center (www.sprc.org)
The Trevor Project (www.thetrevorproject.org)