



Worcester Public Schools

Worcester, Massachusetts



Office of the Superintendent
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Superintendent

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Dear Parents:

There is a new Netflix series, *13 Reasons Why*, which has gained a lot of attention from children and adolescents. The trending series is based on a young adult novel by the same name and focuses a 17 year old student, Hannah Baker, who takes her own life and leaves behind audio recordings of 13 people who she says were part of the reason she killed herself. Producers of the show say they hope the series can help those who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide; however, the series is raising concerns amongst suicide prevention experts about the potential risks posed by the sensationalized treatment of youth suicide and the inability of adult role models to provide help for the student. Further, this series contains graphic depictions of bullying, rape, and drunk driving.

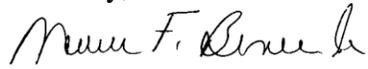
The National Association of School Psychologists does not recommend that vulnerable youth, especially those who have any degree of suicidal ideation watch this series as the story may lead impressionable viewers to romanticize the choices made by the characters and / or develop revenge fantasies. While many youth are resilient and capable of differentiating between a TV drama and real life, engaging in thoughtful conversations with them is vital. Doing so presents an opportunity to help them process the issues addressed, consider the consequences of choices, and reinforces the message that suicide is not a solution to problems. Additionally, the following recommendations and resources are available to families:

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 of it. A resource to assist in this discussion 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 suicide.
3. Get help right away for any individual who is exhibiting concerns. Contact 911 if emergency help is needed.
4. Know that supports are available at school. Each Worcester Public School and program has a School Adjustment Counselor or School Psychologist assigned to assist with students. If you would like to speak to your child's counselor or school psychologist about concerns, or to get information about other resources in the community, you can call the school, or the District Child Study office at 508-799-3175.
5. Ask your child how he or she would respond to a friend displaying warning signs of suicide. Talk to your child about how he or she would respond if a friend did express concern. Listen to your child without being judgmental. Remind your child that in addition to your support, there are caring adults at school who can help.

If your child is hesitant about notifying school about concerns of another student, you can contact the staff directly. We are here to help.

If you have any questions or concerns or need additional support, please follow up with supports available in your child's school. We look forward to continuing to work together to keep our students safe and to feel supported.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maureen F. Binienda". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a distinct "B" at the end.

Maureen Binienda
Superintendent