

Every human being is full of infinite worth and is loved by an infinite God
who wants us all to experience the fullness of life.

Life Teen

May 5, 2017

Dear Secondary Parents and Guardians:

A Netflix series, *13 Reasons Why*, based on a novel by Jay Asher, has recently been in the news as it has raised concern regarding the portrayal of suicide. This series is about a high school student who dies by suicide, leaving behind 13 cassette messages that share the events that she believes have led to her death. The series is graphic and sensationalizes the act of suicide. This may lead to some vulnerable students misinterpreting its message.

Given today's access to technology, it is unrealistic to assume that we will be able to shield our students from media that addresses subject matter that is of concern to us. As such, it is most important that we prepare ourselves to give our students the tools they need to become informed consumers of media.

As a Catholic school board, we are entrusted with the education and care of your child. Our staff is trained to support the many needs of our learners, especially those who may be considering suicide. *13 Reasons Why* offers a fictional portrayal of teen suicide; it does not offer support options for students considering this devastating action. It is our goal to provide necessary information that will allow family, staff, chaplaincy leaders and students to work together and ensure that the well-being of all our learners is safeguarded.

Depression and thoughts leading to suicide are very complex issues. Our schools have trained staff who are able to support students by connecting them with the appropriate professionals whose expertise is to support mental health and well-being. It is important to send messages to all students that there are concerned adults who are available to help find solutions and offer comfort and care. As students raise questions about mental health and well-being, staff will address the conversation 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. The book *13 Reasons Why* has been available to students for the past 10 years. Our librarians are provided with considerations to share with students should they choose to borrow this book. However, access to this series is readily available within the public domain.

Here are some tools or suggestions that may assist you to engage in conversation with your child:

- Encourage critical thinking and remind them that the series is fictional and includes many unrealistic elements.
 - Discern whether it is appropriate for your child to watch or read this series; are they developmentally or emotionally able to be critical and objective about its content?
 - If your child is reading or watching this series, ensure that you monitor its impact and engage in discussing the content.

- Remind your child that it is common for people to experience periods of stress and distress. Offer healthy coping strategies, e.g. prayer, meditation, exercise, talking to friends, exploring nature. Model this for your children.
- Let them know that school guidance counsellors are trustworthy professionals. Their depiction in the series wasn't necessarily accurate.
- Remind your child that family members, counsellors, coaches, school staff, chaplaincy leaders, a crisis line like Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868, etc. are always available should they ever need support.
- Direct any friends who may be experiencing these thoughts to seek the assistance of a caring adult. If the friend refuses, encourage your child to reach out to a caring adult for assistance.
- Talk openly about emotional distress and suicide; doing so doesn't make someone more suicidal. 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 take your child to the hospital emergency department or call:
 - Peel Children's Centre Crisis Response Service, 416-410-8615
 - 24.7 Crisis Support Peel 905-278-9036
 - 24.7 Crisis Support Caledon 1-888-811-2222
 - 911
- Take all questions seriously and know that Dufferin- Peel Catholic District School Board staff are here to support you and your family.

While this communication focuses on *13 Reasons Why*, it is important to note that conversations related to mental health and well-being will continue to be raised in response to a variety of media channels, e.g., Twitter, video games, Facebook, movies, etc. As a Catholic school community we will continue to be diligent regarding the media to which our students are exposed.

As always, if you have individual concerns about your child related to mental health, please contact your child's school. Your time in reading this letter and in working along-side our school team is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



M. Mazzorato, Ed. D.
Director of Education

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best"

Philippians 1.9-10a