

May 3, 2017

Dear TUHSD Families,

I am reaching out to you today to relay to you our concerns about the new Netflix series [13 Reasons Why](#). In no way is this message intended to dictate to you or your family what you should or should not watch. However, with such busy lives and open access to media of all types, it is often very difficult to keep track of what is out there and what media our students are consuming. What follows are some reasons why we are concerned, some discussion points if you choose to talk to your teen about the program and links to support services if you or someone in your life is struggling with anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts.

If you are not familiar with [13 Reasons Why](#), the series is based on a bestselling book by the same title and follows a high school student who received 13 tapes made by a classmate before she died by suicide. The tapes explain, in great detail, her 13 reasons for killing herself, focusing on her struggles with bullying, sexual assault, rape and drug/alcohol use. The episodes include a very graphic depiction of the girl's death by suicide and unvarnished scenes of rape and bullying/harassment.

Our student services staff, including school counselors, school psychologists, administrators, and wellness staff, have reported that a number of students have sought support after watching the series. The graphic depictions of bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, and suicide have proven to be very triggering, especially for our students who have experienced or witnessed any of these tough issues in their own lives or who are currently struggling with emotional or social challenges.

Much has been written in the national media about how mental health experts view the series, but very briefly, here are our main concerns, as they relate to how suicide is depicted in the series:

- Suicide is oversimplified. According to the CDC (2010), 75-90% of suicides occur in persons who have had a mental health disorder for at least a year. [13 Reasons Why](#) does not mention mental illness, even depression, at all.
- Depictions of healthy help-seeking behaviors are absent. No alternatives to suicide or healthy coping strategies are offered.
- Over-identification with the main character, who dies by suicide, may lead to contagion or copycat behavior in teens. Additionally, the depiction of the main character as being rational enough to produce tapes that speak to her tormentors from "beyond the grave" while being suicidal is unrealistic. Suicide is most often a very impulsive act triggered by a recent event or events in combination with an existing mental health disorder. Substance abuse can exacerbate this impulsive decision-making.
- Adults in the series are largely unkind and unhelpful. The depictions of parents and the school counselor are especially disturbing. Our students should not be left with the impression that adults in their lives are uncaring and dismissive. Having at least one caring adult in the life of a young person is a powerful protective factor against suicide and we have many in our schools and the broader community.
- The series happens to have been filmed in and around our community, leading to the possibility of an extra layer of personal identification with the story by our young people when they see familiar sites and landmarks.

Please know that we take this topic very seriously and that every student's well-being is our top priority. If your student or one of their friends is experiencing any difficulty with anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts or substance abuse, or has been exposed to trauma, we have people who can help in our schools and in our community.

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

[Warning Signs of Suicide](#) – [afsp.org](#)

[Talking Points for Families](#) – [SAVE.org](#)

[Talking Points for Families](#) – [commonsensemedia.org](#)

[Talking Points for Educators & Families](#)– [nasponline.org](#)

[Marin County Resources for Students & Young Adults](#)

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS IN NEED

Drake HS - Counseling Office (415) 458-3434; Wellness Center (415) 458-3407
Redwood HS - Counseling Office (415) 945-3626; Wellness Center (415) 945-3602
San Andreas HS – Counselor, Cory DeMars (415) 945-3790
Tamalpais HS – Counseling Office (415) 380-3537
Tamiscal HS – Counselor, Wendy Wishart (415) 945-3757

Sincerely,

Wesley Cedros, Ed.S.
Senior Director of Student Services
Tamalpais Union High School District
Phone: (415) 945-1011
Email: wcedros@tamdistrict.org