



Fort McMurray Public School District #2833

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Dear Families,

We want to make you aware of a book and Netflix series causing concern in the educational community. Netflix has released a new series, *13 Reasons Why*, that may harm students who struggle with mental health challenges.

Based on a young adult novel, the fictional series depicts events leading to death by suicide of a young character. It has graphic content related to suicide, glamorization of suicidal behaviour and negative portrayals of helping professionals, which may prevent youth from seeking help.

We have recommended that our teachers NOT use this as a teaching aid. Some students could watch the series and potentially benefit with adult support. Others may have a negative reaction such as blaming the victim or others and may identify with the victim and the attention the victim's death received.

Incidents of self-harm can increase after media portrayals of suicide. We do not want to contribute to this. We know, of course, that some students will watch this series or read the book outside of school.

If your child is watching this series or reading this book, we recommend watching or reading with them in case they have concerns or questions. We have also attached a tip sheet below as a resource to help families speak to their children about this issue.

If you have concerns about your child, please speak with our school Psychologist Natali Levasseur 780-799-8012 or contact the SOS 24 Hour Crisis at 780-743-4357.

Natali Levasseur, R. Psychologist

Natali Levasseur

FMPSD District Psychologist

Resource

[13 Reasons Why-Suggestions for Families](#)

13 Reasons Why – Suggestions for Families

The Netflix series **13 Reasons Why** is graphic and potentially triggering for vulnerable young people. Because some youth may have questions, the following suggestions may be of help:

1. Explain the Series' use of Dramatic Effect:

- Explain that this series is a fictional drama with many unrealistic elements. Youth commonly identify with TV or movie characters and may share similar experiences and thoughts. There are healthier ways to cope with these feelings than the ways depicted for dramatic effect.

2. Clarify misinformation in the series:

- Suicide and the reasons for it are complex. Most people who die by suicide live with a mental illness, but not all people with these struggles have suicidal thoughts or behavior. Effective treatments do help people struggling with a mental illness.
- Suicide is not a common response to life's challenges. Most people who face bullying, the death of a friend or other adversities depicted in the series do not die by suicide. Most reach out, talk to others, seek help and find productive ways to cope. They go on to lead healthy lives.
- Asking for help and receiving support is a "protective" factor for someone with emotional difficulties, meaning that it can protect them from self-harm.
- Suicide is never heroic or romantic. The fictional death by suicide in the series is a cautionary tale not meant to be viewed as heroic.
- The death of a person by suicide is never the fault of survivors of a suicide loss. There are resources and support groups for suicide loss survivors.

3. Encourage Healthy Coping:

- Be sure your child knows that periods of stress or mental distress are normal. Encourage healthy ways to cope with stress such as exercise, reading a book, listening to music, talking with friends, enjoying nature and more. Demonstrate healthy coping and care for yourself.

4. Encourage Help Seeking:

- Note the inaccurate way that the series depicts school guidance counselors. These staff are caring, trustworthy professionals who are a source of help. Other helpers include family members, teachers, coaches and friends as long as an adult is also involved.
- If you have concerns about your child, please speak with your school principal or Some Other Solutions 24 hr Crisis Line at 780 743-4357 or Kids Help Phone (www.kidshelpphone.ca or 1-800- 668-6868).

5. Encourage Caring Support:

- Talking openly and honestly about emotional distress and suicide is okay. It will not make youth more suicidal or put the idea of suicide in their mind. If you are concerned about someone, ask them about it. If someone tells you they are suicidal, take them seriously and get help. Knowing how to acknowledge and respond to someone who shares their thoughts of emotional distress or suicide with you is important. Don't judge them or their thoughts. Listen. Be caring and kind. Offer to stay with them. Offer to go with them to get help or to contact a crisis line.

Always feel free to talk to Natali Levasseur, Mental Health Coordinator or your family doctor.

Natali Levasseur, R. Psychologist Mental Health Coordinator