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Dear Parents / Guardians,

We are writing to share information related to the **Netflix series 13 Reasons Why**. The series deals with the difficult topic of suicide. Schools have an important role in preventing youth suicide. We feel it is important to share information with you at this time.

The **Netflix series 13 Reasons Why**, and the book this series is based on, may pose a risk to students who are struggling with stressful experiences. The story is of a 17-year-old girl who dies by suicide. She leaves behind cassette tapes for 13 people whose action she perceives were reasons why she killed herself. It is important to highlight that no person can cause another person's suicide.

The series is raising concerns from suicide prevention experts about the potential risks. The series graphically depicts a suicide death and covers a number of difficult topics such as a bullying, rape, drunk driving and shaming. It also portrays adults and counsellors as unhelpful.

Series like this one can lead to misinformation about suicide. You may wish to ask your child if they have heard of or seen this series. While many youth know the difference between a TV drama and real life, talking with adults about this subject is very important. Adults can help share the message that **suicide is not a solution to problems and help is available**. Research shows that exposure to real or dramatized stories of suicide can increase risk.

The following are suggestions which may help with the conversation:

- Remind them that the series is fictional.
- Share that it is normal to experience periods of stress and distress. Offer healthy coping strategies, e.g. exercise, art, journaling, talking to friends and adults they trust.
- Let them know that there are adults at school who care and can help.
- Talk about where to seek support if they need it from family members, counsellors, coaches, teachers, faith leaders, a crisis line like Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868, etc.
- Talk openly about emotional distress and suicide. Doing so in a fact-based manner does not increase suicide risk (see tips below).
- If you have concerns about your child's mental health, see your family physician and/or share your concerns with the school.
- If the concern is more urgent, call York Region's Crisis Response Service, 1-855-310-COPE (2673) or take your child to a hospital emergency department. If there is an emergency call 911.

### **Possible signs someone may be having thoughts of suicide:**

- Suicide threats, both direct (“I am going to kill myself.” “I need life to stop.”) and indirect (“I need it to stop.” “I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up.”). Threats can be verbal or written and are often found in online postings;
- Giving away possessions;
- Preoccupation with death in conversation, writing, drawing and social media;
- Changes in behavior, appearance/hygiene, thoughts and/or feelings. This can include someone who is typically sad who suddenly becomes extremely happy;
- Emotional distress;
- Withdrawing from friends and family.

Trust yourself as a parent/guardian. If you feel something is not right with your child or notice any of the signs above, do not hesitate to ask directly about thoughts of suicide. This may be a tough conversation to have but sends a message that you are open to talking about suicide and increases the chances your child will seek help. That might sound like,

*“Sometimes when people are under stress, having trouble with friends, and worrying a lot, they have thoughts of suicide. Are you having thoughts of suicide?”*

To learn more about safely talking about suicide, consider taking a suicide prevention program. Find out more at [www.livingworks.net](http://www.livingworks.net).

Many staff in York Region District School Board are trained in suicide intervention and want to help. If you have concerns about your child’s mental health, or need additional resources, please contact your child’s school. Thank you for partnering with us to support student mental health and well-being.