

MAY 1, 2017

## SUICIDE PREVENTION AND “13 REASONS WHY”

The Mental Health Team at KCAA works hard to identify students in DPS who may be experiencing suicidal ideation and to put in place interventions and supports for safety. Part of this work is increasing awareness about community events that may lead to possible contagion with our youth. The Netflix series: “13 Reasons Why” is one of these possible factors. “13 Reasons Why” is gaining popularity among youth in Denver and may increase suicidal ideation or attempts among DPS students.

**(Scroll to bottom to go directly to resources)**

### **Why We Need to Talk About 13 Reasons Why**

We are aware that students are likely watching and discussing the most recent Netflix series hit, “13 Reasons Why”, based on the popular book by Jay Asher. The series follows a group of high school students as they piece together a story left behind for them by their classmate Hannah Baker, who died by suicide.

While this popular series sheds light on important topics, there are some shortcomings in its execution. Without mention of mental illness, which affects one in five adolescents, and coming dangerously close to romanticizing suicide, this show is missing a crucial opportunity to discuss an issue that is affecting so many teenagers. Additionally, there is no example of successful help-seeking with a theme of silence throughout the story. As Hannah’s classmates struggle with the aftermath of her suicide, there are no scenes highlighting her peers reaching out to talk with their parents, teachers, or coaches despite having a difficult time coping. Without showing how to ask for help, or that treatment and counseling are available, the show is only depicting what not to do without giving an example of what to do.

In addition, there is an unfortunate scene in which Hannah visits a counselor at school and discloses that she has been raped and is struggling. The counselor not only doesn’t offer hope, compassion, or resources, but blames her for the rape and lets her leave while she is clearly distressed. **IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT THIS IS A FICTIONAL REPRESENTATION AND IS NOT HOW ANY COUNSELOR AT KCAA WOULD TREAT THE SITUATION!**

Denver Public Schools teaches the Signs of Suicide (SOS) curriculum in sixth and ninth grade. It is a good time to remind students of the messages of hope that they learned during the SOS Program. **Suicide is never the solution!** There is always something you can do if you are concerned about something someone has said or done in person or online:

## ACT

- Acknowledge that they are seeing warning signs and that it is serious
- Care: show the person your concern
- Tell a trusted adult

Please contact one of the individuals below if you, your child, or a friend has questions, concerns, or reactions to watching the series. Likewise, it is essential that you reach out to a professional if you believe someone may be thinking of suicide as an option.

**Always take warning signs seriously, and never promise to keep them secret.**

### **Common signs include:**

- 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 they are often found in online postings.
- Giving away prized 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.

Students who feel suicidal are not likely to seek help directly; however, parents, school personnel, and peers can recognize the warning signs and take immediate action to keep the youth safe. When a student gives signs that they may be considering suicide, take the following actions.

- Remain calm, be nonjudgmental, and listen. Strive to understand the intolerable emotional pain that has resulted in suicidal thoughts.
- Avoid statements that might be perceived as minimizing the student’s emotional pain (e.g., “You need to move on.” or “You should get over it.”).
- Ask the student **directly** if they are thinking about suicide (i.e., “Are you thinking of suicide?”).
- Focus on your concern for their well-being and avoid being accusatory.
- Reassure the student that there is help and they will not feel like this forever.
- Provide constant supervision. **Do not leave the student alone.**
- Without putting yourself in danger, remove means for self-harm, including any weapons the person might find.
- **Get help.** Never agree to keep a student’s suicidal thoughts a secret. Instead, school staff should take the student to a school-employed mental health professional. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources. Students should tell an appropriate caregiving adult, such as a school

psychologist, administrator, parent, or teacher. **\*You can always call 911 or take your child to the emergency room during no-school hours.**

## **Resources**

**The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255)**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Crisis Text Line (741741)**

**Safe To Tell** – Submit an anonymous report - <https://safe2tell.org/students> or 1-877-542-7233

**Colorado Crisis and Support Line-** 844-493-8255, or text TALK to 38255

## **KCAA Resources**

- School Psychologist – Veronica Martinez 720-424-0150
- Social Worker – Desiree Sanchez 720-424-0245
- Nurse – Amy Mitchell 720-424-0208
- High School Counselor- Madiha Shaheen 720-424-0153
- Middle School Counselor- Ibonne Pineda 720-424-0172

## **Resources for discussing the Netflix Series “13 Reasons Why”:**

NASP (National Association of School Psychologists) 13 Reasons Why Netflix Series: Considerations for Educators: <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/13-reasons-why-netflix-series-considerations-for-educators>