

May 17, 2018

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and an opportune time to update you on a current issue. The Netflix series, “13 Reasons Why” became incredibly popular last year with school-aged children and was the one of the most “most-tweeted about” programs of 2017. Many young children watched the entire series without parental knowledge. This is to share with parents that Season 2 of the series is being released on May 18, 2018. Provided below are some important considerations for parents:

- The first season, rated MA for mature audiences only, was virally popular among adolescents, but raised significant concerns for parents, educators, and mental health professionals because of its dramatic, often graphic portrayal of difficult issues such as sexual assault and suicide. Netflix’s stated goal of sparking conversations about these very real issues is a good one. However, most experts believed that the intense handling of the content without appropriate safeguards (such as warning cards before each episode) had the potential to put some vulnerable youth at risk for emotional distress or harmful behavior, including increased suicide ideation and attempts.
- Many education and mental health organizations communicated directly with Netflix about concerns regarding a second season. These concerns included:
 - the lack of cautions regarding vulnerable youth and safeguards associated with each episode
 - the overwhelmingly negative choices and actions of the teen characters, the unrealistically clueless and uncaring depiction of adults
 - the failure to address mental health directly
 - the unnecessarily graphic and potentially triggering depiction of harmful behaviors, such as a possible school shooting alluded to at the end of the first season
- Netflix appears to have listened to some of the guidance they received. Cast members have recorded a video warning viewers that they may not want to watch the series if they are struggling with similar issues, or to watch the series with a trusted adult. The video also urges viewers to reach out for help and talk to someone if they need assistance. Netflix has indicated that it will provide warning cards before each episode, a discussion guide designed to facilitate conversations and outlets for assistance for viewers, and other safeguards.
- **Importantly, there are indications that young people are watching or rewatching the first season in order to “be up to speed” for the second season.** Netflix has created a discussion guide and added some additional warning cards; however, we strongly recommend that vulnerable children and youth (such as those struggling with depression, previous suicidal behavior, or trauma) not watch the first season, and most certainly not alone. We have included the discussion guide on the CCPS website.

- Given the possible storylines set up at the end of the first season (e.g., another suicide attempt, a rape trial, and a school shooting), it is important for adults to be aware of what the children and youth in their care are watching. This includes monitoring access to content via computers and mobile devices.
- School counselors and psychologists are available to engage in supportive conversations with children and youth as well as provide resources and offer expertise in preventing harmful behaviors. Following are some general recommendations:
 - Encourage parents to watch the series with their child; children and youth who view this series may need supportive adults to help process it. Help students articulate their perceptions when viewing controversial content. The difficult issues portrayed do occur in schools and communities, and it is important for adults to listen, take adolescents' concerns seriously, and be willing to offer to help.
 - Caution against binge watching, as doing so with intense content, particularly in isolation, can be associated with increased mental health concerns.
 - Reinforce that school-employed mental health professionals are available to help.
 - Make sure parents, teachers, and students are aware of suicide risk warning signs. **Always take warning signs seriously, and never promise to keep them secret. Establish a confidential reporting mechanism for students.**
 - Reinforcing resiliency and protective factors can lessen the potential of risk factors that lead to suicidal ideation and behaviors. Once a child or adolescent is considered at risk, schools, families, and friends should work to build these factors in and around the youth.

[Click here](#) to view the CCPS mental health page on the district website for additional local and online resources. Also, please [click here](#) to view videos and access resources from our recent "Supporting Your Child Socially and Emotionally" Virtual Symposium.