

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Shawsheen Valley Technical High School wants to alert you of the recent release of the Netflix series *Thirteen Reasons Why*. This series is based on the book that was released 10 years ago. It depicts a group of high school students as they follow the story that was left behind for them by their classmate who died by suicide.

The trailer and advertisements for the series can be misleading. In watching the series, young people and teenagers could perceive the message that suicide is a viable and/or romanticized option. The content of the series is extremely graphic with troubling scenes throughout each episode, which may be difficult for the teenage mind to watch and process in an appropriate way.

The series has some of the following shortcomings:

- There is no mention of mental health and treatment options, as it references suicide throughout
- The idea of suicide is romanticized throughout
- There are no examples of help-seeking by the teens impacted
- There are several scenes throughout depicting serious trauma, which the teens do not seek help or resources for (i.e., rape, bullying, car accidents, fights, alcoholism, suicide)
- The series does not express what to do in harmful situations in terms of getting help or utilizing healthy coping skills
- The series is not meant to be an educational film, and its message does not comply with the health recommendations for treating mental health, and/or trauma, or preventing suicide

We strongly encourage you to find out if your child has read the book, watched the series, or heard of the series; if they have, please talk with them about it. We also suggest that you research the series so you understand what your child may be exposed to. While many youth are resilient and capable of differentiating between a TV series and real life, engaging in thoughtful conversations with them about the show is vital. Having a discussion with your child provides an opportunity to help them process the issues addressed, consider the consequences of certain choices, and reinforce the message that suicide is NOT a solution to problems and that help is available. Below is a list of talking points included in this correspondence to help with these conversations, as well as a list of resources for your reference.

Thank you for your attention to this very important topic. Should you feel you need more information or support, please contact the guidance department and/or school psychologist at Shawsheen Valley Technical High School.

Sincerely,

Jobee B. O'Sullivan, MA  
Director of Guidance & Health Services

### Talking points for *Thirteen Reasons Why*:

- Reassure your youth of your love and support. Remind your youth that there is no problem too great to be handled.
- The main character in the series was experiencing an untreated mental health problem. Suicide is not a common response to life's challenges or adversity. The vast majority of people who experience bullying, the death of a friend, or any other adversity described in *Thirteen Reasons Why* do not die by suicide. Most reach out, talk to others and seek help or find other productive ways of coping. They go on to lead healthy, normal lives.
- It is important to know that, there are many treatment options for life challenges, distress and mental illness. Mental illness is treatable. If you feel like you need support or someone to talk to, reach out. Talk with a friend, family member, a counselor, or therapist. There is always someone who will listen.
- You may have similar experiences and thoughts as some of the characters in *Thirteen Reasons Why*. People often identify with characters they see on TV or in movies. However, it is important to remember that there are healthy ways to cope with the topics covered in the series and acting on suicidal thoughts is not one of them.
- Suicide is never a heroic or romantic act. The main character's suicide (although fictional) is a cautionary tale, not meant to appear heroic and should be viewed as a tragedy.
- If you are concerned about someone, ask them about it. It will not make someone more suicidal or put the idea of suicide in their mind. 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.
- When you die, you do not get to make a movie or talk to people any more. Leaving messages from beyond the grave is a dramatization produced in Hollywood and is not possible in real life.
- The main character's tapes blame others for her suicide. Suicide is never the fault of survivors of suicide loss. There are resources and support groups for suicide loss survivors.