



**MONROE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS**  
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Dear Parent/Guardian:

The Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* Season 2 is now available for viewing. It is expected to be as intense and virally popular with adolescents as season 1, which many watched without adult knowledge or presence. Like season 1, season 2 deals with mature themes, including a suicide, date rape, bullying and harassment, alcohol and drug use, and extreme violence. The intense, graphic portrayal of these difficult issues involving youth present both the risk of triggering harmful behaviors among some vulnerable youth and the opportunity for adults to engage in meaningful and supportive discussions with youth about these issues.

We encourage you to talk with your children about the show and, if they are going to watch it, to do so with them. While Netflix has added more safeguards to the series, these are not a substitute for adult involvement. A consortium of education and mental health organizations has created an online toolkit with guidance, talking points and other resources specific to the series and issues portrayed  
<https://www.13reasonswhytoolkit.org/educators>.

The following guidance for families from the National Association of School Psychologists also may help you support your children:<sup>1</sup>

- Ask your child[ren] if they have heard or seen the series *13 Reasons Why*. While we don't recommend that they be encouraged to view the series, do tell them you want to watch it with them or to catch up, and discuss their thoughts.
- Be willing and prepared to engage in conversations about these issues with your child[ren], including asking if they have witnessed or experienced any of the circumstances portrayed, what their thoughts and feelings are, and how they think adults could help.
- Listen to your children's comments without judgment. Doing so requires that you fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said. Put your own agenda aside.
- If they exhibit any of the warning signs [below], don't be afraid to ask if they have thought about suicide or if someone is hurting them. Raising the issue of suicide *does not increase the risk or plant the idea* [emphasis added]. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity to offer help.
- Ask your child[ren] if they think any of their friends or classmates exhibit warning signs. Talk with them about how to seek help for their friend or classmate. Guide them on how to respond when they see or hear any of the warning signs.
- Get help from a school-employed or community-based mental health professional if you are concerned for your child's safety or the safety of one of their peers.

Some of the warning signs that an individual, even a child, is in emotional distress or thinking about suicide are:

- Direct (“I am going to kill myself”) or indirect (“I wish things would stop”) threats of suicide, both verbal and in writing. Many of these threats are made online or using social media.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Dramatic change in eating or sleeping habits (either too much or too little).
- Withdrawal and isolation from friends and family.
- Changes in behavior, appearance, hygiene, thoughts, or feelings. A person who typically is sad and suddenly is very happy or at ease is a warning sign.

All warning signs should be taken seriously. Community supports are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and always are available for consultation if you are concerned about your children.

- NJ Children’s System of Care (Mobile Crisis Response) 1-877-652-7624
- APS (Acute Psychiatric Services) Rutgers Behavioral Health Crisis screening 1-855-515-5700
- Second Floor Youth Helpline 1-888-222-2228
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255.

School counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers are available if you have any questions about how to support your children. I thank you for partnering with our schools to support the social-emotional health and wellbeing of students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael G. Kozak

Adapted from a Montgomery County Public Schools (MD) letter to parents.

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<sup>i</sup> National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *13 Reasons Why* Netflix Series: Considerations for Educators. (2017). Bethesda, MD: Author.