



Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board  
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Dear Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board Parents and Guardians:

As you may be aware, recently, Netflix released *13 Reasons Why*, a series based on a novel by Jay Asher. The series depicts the story of a high school student who dies by suicide, leaving behind 13 cassette recordings that share the events that she perceives led to her death. The series is graphic and sensationalizes the act of suicide, which may lead to vulnerable students misinterpreting its message.

Although this series has been promoted by the creators as a tool to help students recognize their impact on others to prevent suicide, it does **not** address mental illness **or** present viable alternatives to suicide, including seeking support from mental health professionals. At no point do the actors seek help from family members, friends or other trusted adults!

Series like this one can lead to misconceptions and misinformation about suicide, and possibly to the glorification of suicide and suicide contagion. For these reasons, in concert with mental health professionals, the Catholic Church and other school boards, we feel it is necessary to make you aware of this series and its troubling content.

While we are unaware of any specific incidents related to this series, we want to let you know that we will continue to do everything we can to support student mental health and well-being. As students raise questions about the series, staff will address the content in ways that are sensitive and appropriate, especially with our most vulnerable students.

We do not endorse this program or recommend that students see it. If it comes to your attention that your child has heard of this program, or in fact seen it, please consider the following suggestions:

- Encourage critical thinking and remind your child that the series is fictional and includes many unrealistic elements.
- Remind them that it is normal to experience periods of stress and distress. Offer healthy coping strategies, e.g. exercise, talking to parents, trusted adults, friends, and exploring nature. Model this for your children.
- Let them know that school counsellors **are** professionals and trustworthy and that their depiction in the series wasn't accurate.
- Remind them to always 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, does not make someone more suicidal. If you have concerns about your child's mental health, see your family physician and speak to your child's principal or vice-principal right away.
- If the concern is more urgent call your local Children's Mental Health Agency, take your child to a hospital emergency department or call 911.
- Take all questions seriously and know that Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board staff are here to support you and your family.

As always, if you have individual concerns about your child related to 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.

Thank you,

Brian Beal  
Director of Education

*Our Mission: Our inclusive Catholic learning community is dedicated to excellence. We give witness to the teachings of Jesus Christ, as we journey in faith and learning, to develop the God-given abilities of each person.*