

Dear Parents,

May 15, 2017

I've recently been made aware of a new Netflix Series called "13 Reasons Why". After doing a little research I thought it was important to alert you to what is being depicted. This series has become very popular with teens and I wanted to be proactive in alerting you to some of the concerns surrounding the series. Many school systems have warned parents about the series since it deals with topics that require discernment and guidance for our young people.

For those of you not acquainted with this book/series, here is the synopsis from IMBd:

13 Reasons Why, based on the best-selling books by Jay Asher, follows teenager Clay Jensen as he returns home from school to find a mysterious box with his name on it lying on his porch. Inside he discovers a group of cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker his classmate and crush-who tragically committed suicide two weeks earlier. On tape, Hannah unfolds an emotional audio diary, detailing the thirteen reasons why she decided to end her life. Through Hannah and Clay's dual narratives, 13 Reasons Why weaves an intricate and heartrending story of confusion and desperation that will deeply affect viewers.

The series deals with topics such as bullying, sexual assault, social isolation and suicide. Although these are important topics to discuss with our children, the reviews of the series I've seen indicate that "suicide is being glorified" and doesn't realistically portray some of the important topics in the show.

In many arenas, there are a consistent set of recommendations being offered to parents. While spurred by the series' popularity, they are nonetheless great recommendations for any parent regardless of whether or not you will watch the show:

- Do take this as an opportunity to have an open, age appropriate conversation with your child
- Make sure your child knows the steps to take to find trusted help from an adult
- Know the signs of depression or possible suicide and always take warning signs seriously. Signs include:
 - Talking about wanting to die
 - Looking for a way to kill oneself
 - Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
 - Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
 - Talking about being a burden to others
 - Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
 - Acting anxious, agitated, or recklessly

- Sleeping too little or too much
 - Withdrawing or feeling isolated
 - Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
 - Displaying extreme mood swings
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- Know what to do and discuss an action plan with your child, when there is a risk of suicide including:
 - Do not leave the person alone
 - Remove any firearms, alcohol, drugs, or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt
 - Call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**
 - Take the person to an emergency room, or seek help from a medical or mental health professional

We can use this as a teachable moment for our children. If your child has watched the series, hopefully you've watched with them and talked about your values and perspective on these topics. The recommended age for the series is 16, but if you have a Netflix account, it's quite possible younger members of your family have seen this.

Our Catholic faith teaches that life is a gift from God. We are called to live our lives in accord with the teachings of Scripture and the Church. Taking time to talk to our children about the preciousness of life, that a temporary answer can become permanent, and that we are called to use the gift of sexuality in the context of a committed marital relationship is critical in developing their conscience and in helping them to grow as disciples of Jesus.

The intent of this letter is not to judge anyone's choices, it is simply to highlight the need that we have to keep our finger on the pulse of what our children are viewing and what messages are being sent. As we reflect on the impact of this series in the youth culture, let's reach out together to families who have been impacted in any way by mental health crises and suicide. Let's not fear as parents taking on the tough topics our kids need to discuss with us. And finally let's pray for all of those who struggle in any way with suicide or suicidal ideation, or the devastating loss of a loved one.

An Additional resource to watch is a YouTube video by LifeTeen. The link is:
[. https://youtu.be/Hoebx5nWVBI](https://youtu.be/Hoebx5nWVBI)

Sincerely,

Sister Brenda Monahan