



# School District of Altoona

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Dear Families,

The vision of the Altoona School District, in partnership with our students, their families, and our community, is to build a foundation for life-long learning and the emotional well-being of our students. In keeping with this vision, we want to make parents aware of the online series, *13 Reasons Why*, which is currently trending on Netflix. You may or may not be familiar with this novel and/or series. The plot revolves around a teenage girl who takes her own life and leaves behind audio recordings for 13 people who she says in some way contributed to her suicide. While the intent of the producers was to bring awareness to an important topic, mental health professionals and educators are concerned with the impact the show may have on youth, particularly vulnerable adolescents.

We are aware that many students have already watched, are watching, or have easy access to watch this show, and therefore, feel it is important to share information regarding guidance for talking with children about this show. The below information, which has been adopted from guidance provided by the National Association of School Psychologists, provides information for families in speaking with their children about the series *13 Reasons Why*.

## **Guidance for Families**

- Ask your child if they have heard or seen the series *13 Reasons Why*. While we don't recommend that students be encouraged to view the series, you may want tell them you want to watch it, with them or to catch up, and discuss their thoughts.
- If they exhibit any of the warning signs of suicide, 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. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity to offer help. Warning signs of suicide include:
  - Suicide threats, both direct ("I am going to kill myself." "I need life to stop.") and indirect ("I need it to stop." "I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up."). Threats can be verbal or written, and they are often found in online postings.
  - Giving away prized possessions.
  - Preoccupation with death in conversation, writing, drawing, and social media.

- Changes in behavior, appearance/hygiene, thoughts, and/or feelings. This can include someone who is typically sad who suddenly becomes extremely happy.
- Emotional distress.
- Ask your child 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.
- 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 you are concerned for your child's safety or the safety of one of their peers, please get help from a school-employed or community-based mental health professional. 24-hour crisis support is available through The National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or texting "START" to 741741.

The well-being of students is a top priority of the staff at Altoona School District. We hope in sharing this information, you find the tools and information needed to have an informative and supportive conversation with your child.