



## Huntington Union Free School District

*"A Tradition of Excellence since 1657"*

James W. Polansky

Superintendent of Schools

May 10, 2018

Dear Parents and Staff,

Please be aware that next week, Netflix will begin airing the second season of the TV-MA (mature audiences) series titled **13 Reasons Why**, based on a 2007 novel by Jay Asher. Recall that the first season, portraying a young girl explaining why she committed suicide, rapidly gained popularity among young people. While the first season seemed to end on a clear closing note, its wide viewership should make it less than surprising that the producers chose to continue the series.

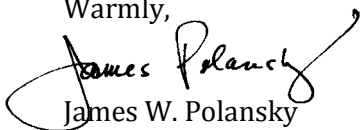
The second season will portray a range of sensitive and complex social issues that adolescents may face, as well as episodes of violence. As such, I feel it is important to bring back to light concerns similar to those related to the first season. The show is, once again, certain to attract teenage viewers. Further, parents may not be aware of the content or the fact that episodes will contain mature subject matter. Note that the new season's trailer can be accessed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=0XuOkYIUWIs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=0XuOkYIUWIs).

While it is not necessarily our role to suggest what is or is not appropriate for individual children to watch at home, we do recommend that if the family decision is to allow your child to watch the upcoming episodes, he/she be joined by an adult who is comfortable in discussing topics of a socially sophisticated and complex nature.

Attached for your reference is additional information on the second season compiled by the National Association of School Psychologists. Within the document are links to numerous other pertinent resources. Additionally, I encourage you to contact your child's principal, assistant principal, school counselor, social worker or psychologist should you need their assistance in any regard.

As always, maintaining the physical and mental well-being of our students is a foremost priority. I hope that this information helps toward achieving our unwavering and collaborative goal of helping them to make good decisions and continue on a path toward long, happy, healthy and productive lives.

Warmly,

  
James W. Polansky  
Superintendent of Schools

Attachment

## Information Regarding the Upcoming Release of *13 Reasons Why, Season 2*

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has received numerous requests for guidance regarding the upcoming second season of the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*. Netflix has not formally announced the release date, but prerelease promotions and media coverage indicate a release date sometime this spring, approximately a year after the release of the first season.

NASP has not been able to preview the second season, but we can provide the following information and considerations.

1. The first season, which was virally popular among adolescents, raised significant concerns for parents, educators, and mental health professionals because of its dramatic, often graphic portrayal of difficult issues such as sexual assault and suicide. Netflix's stated goal of sparking conversations about these very real issues is a good one. However, most experts believed that the intense handling of the content without appropriate safeguards (such as warning cards before each episode) had the potential to put some vulnerable youth at risk for emotional distress or harmful behavior, including increased suicide ideation and attempts.
2. NASP issued [guidance](#) to help schools and families engage in supportive discussions with youth and respond to the needs of those who may have been triggered by viewing the series. We also joined with other education and mental health organizations to communicate directly with Netflix about [concerns](#) regarding a second season.
3. Chief among our recommendations were to address: the lack of cautions regarding vulnerable youth and safeguards associated with each episode, the overwhelmingly negative choices and actions of the teen characters, the unrealistically clueless and uncaring depiction of adults, the failure to address mental health directly, and the unnecessarily graphic and potentially triggering depiction of harmful behaviors, such as a possible school shooting alluded to at the end of the first season.
4. Netflix appears to have listened to some of the guidance they received. Cast members have recorded [a video](#) warning some viewers that they may not want to watch the series if they are struggling with similar issues, or to watch the series with a trusted adult. The video also urges viewers to "reach out for help" and "talk to someone" if they need assistance. Netflix has indicated that it will provide warning cards before each episode, a discussion guide designed to facilitate conversations and outlets for assistance for viewers, and [other safeguards](#).
5. **Importantly, there are indications that young people are watching or rewatching the first season in order to "be up to speed" for the second season.** Netflix has created a [discussion guide](#) and added some additional warning cards; however, we strongly recommend that vulnerable children and youth (such as those struggling with depression, previous suicidal behavior, or trauma) not watch the first season, and most certainly not alone. Schools and parents can refer to our [season 1 guidance](#) for additional recommendations.
6. Netflix has not confirmed the season 2 storylines other than to say that most of the season 1 characters will return and that difficult issues will again be explored. Given the possible storylines set up at the end of season 1 (e.g., another suicide attempt, a rape trial, and a school shooting), it is important for adults to be aware of what the children and youth in their care are watching. This includes monitoring access to content via computers and mobile devices.

7. School psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals can assist stakeholders (e.g., school administrators, parents, and teachers) to engage in supportive conversations with children and youth as well as provide resources and offer expertise in preventing harmful behaviors. Following are some general recommendations:
- Provide the guidance developed by NASP for [13 Reasons Why, Season 1](#) to parents and educators.
  - Encourage parents to watch the series with their child; children and youth who view this series may need supportive adults to help process it. Help students articulate their perceptions when viewing controversial content. The difficult issues portrayed do occur in schools and communities, and it is important for adults to listen, take adolescents' concerns seriously, and be willing to offer to help.
  - Caution against binge watching, as doing so with intense content, particularly in isolation, can be associated with increased mental health concerns.
  - Reinforce that school-employed mental health professionals are available to help.
  - Make sure parents, teachers, and students are aware of [suicide risk warning signs](#). **Always take warning signs seriously, and never promise to keep them secret. Establish a confidential reporting mechanism for students.**
  - Reinforcing resiliency and protective factors can lessen the potential of risk factors that lead to suicidal ideation and behaviors. Once a child or adolescent is considered at risk, schools, families, and friends should work to build these factors in and around the youth.

NASP fully supports a stated goal for the Netflix series: the need for forthright discussions among youth and between youth and adults about the serious issues represented. We are hopeful that Netflix is adopting a responsible way to do this, which requires both providing the scaffolding for supportive engagement and minimizing harmful triggers. We will offer further content-specific guidance if deemed necessary, once we have had the opportunity to review the second season.

## RESOURCES

- **National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text "START" to 741741**
- [SAMHSA Prevention Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center, After a Suicide: Toolkit for Schools](#)
- [School Violence Prevention](#)
- ["13 Reasons Why" Netflix Series\(Season 1\): Considerations for Educators and Families](#)

## WEBSITES

- National Association of School Psychologists, [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, [www.save.org](http://www.save.org)
- American Association of Suicidology, [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, <https://afsp.org/>
- [Stopbullying.gov](http://Stopbullying.gov)
- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)
- [13reasonswhy.info/](http://13reasonswhy.info/)