



# ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

SECRETARY FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION/SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Entering the Third  
Millennium proclaiming  
in faith and love the  
mission of Christ the  
Redeemer!

May 3, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians,

St. John Paul II wrote, "The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message."

I want to share with you our concern about a newly released Netflix miniseries called, "13 Reasons Why." Selena Gomez, a former Disney star, produced the show based on the 2007 fictional book by Jay Asher. "13 Reasons Why" tells the story of a teen who commits suicide. This series depicts strong and graphic themes of suicide, sexual assault, drug use, bullying, and other social issues that may affect teens. This series has attracted the interest of many young people specifically students in middle and high school with discussions about the show becoming prominent and trending on social media. Although the show is fictional, the nature of the storyline raises serious concerns as to the emotional safety of adolescents who may be watching, especially children who have had experience with mental health issues and/or suicidal thoughts of behavior.

The Catholic News Agency (CNA) reported that another issue with the show is that none of the characters have a sense of or even mention a loving God. Although there is value in the anti-bullying messages of the show, the show attributes all of the problems of youth to social media and bullying. These things are just symptoms.

The loss of faith, the loss of the conviction of a loving personal God and the loss of a sense of eternity are all feelings of defeat that can make suicide a logical response to suffering. The old adage, "It takes a Village to Raise a Child," cannot be ignored! Our schools and parishes must plan to guide our middle school and high school students so they feel cared for and loved. One thing that was missing from the book and the TV show was support for Hannah, the main character, both from home and school. There are many times we are unaware of the students' experiences and their emotional responses both at school and at home. It is important for all of us to play a proactive role in their lives, to be involved, to talk to the students and let them know that we care and we are invested in them.

We encourage you to speak with your child if he/she is watching the series. Our principals and staff are always available to meet with students and parents who are having difficulty processing the content of the series. There are specific protocols in place to address serious incidents and mental health concerns such as but not limited to home communication and Catholic Charities and community resource referrals.

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Below are links that offer tips and strategies on how to discuss the sensitive topics with your children as you help them process the many issues the program raises.

I would like to close with two quotes from Pope Francis, "There are difficult moments in life but with hope the soul goes forward and looks ahead to what awaits us."

"God has no memory of sin, but only of us, each of us, we are his beloved children. And he believes that it is always possible to start anew, to raise ourselves up."

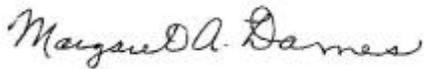
<http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/13-reasons-why-netflix-series-considerations-for-educators>

[http://go.kognito.com/rs/143-HCJ-270/images/PK12\\_Webinar\\_041117\\_13ReasonsWhyTalkingTips.pdf](http://go.kognito.com/rs/143-HCJ-270/images/PK12_Webinar_041117_13ReasonsWhyTalkingTips.pdf)

<http://www.archbalt.org/family-life/respect-life/need-help/suicide-resources.cfm>

<http://www.sprc.org/>

Sincerely,



Margaret A. Dames, Ed.D.  
Secretary for Catholic Education/  
Superintendent of Schools

Sincerely,



Principal

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