



May 1, 2017

Parents/Guardians of Ponca City Public School Students:

In recent weeks there has been quite a bit of discussion in traditional and social media concerning a television series *13 Reasons Why* and an online game Blue Whale Challenge, or as it is more commonly referred to, the Blue Whale Suicide Challenge. It seems today it is harder and harder for parents, guardians, and educators to sift through all the information we receive on the Internet or through social media, and separate fact from fiction so we know what we should, nor should not, be concerned with.

*13 Reasons Why* is a Netflix series that began airing on March 31. Since this is a Netflix original series, all 13 episodes are released at once so viewers have the option of watching all episodes at one time or viewing over several days or weeks. The show claims its intent is to increase awareness of the issue of suicide amongst adolescents/young adults, but mental health professionals across the country are in agreement the show does far more than just that. There is a glorification of the act of suicide in addition to the reinforcement of the idea no one is qualified to help and isolation and despair are inevitable.

The series also paints the mental health professionals, who are trained to help with the issues young people are facing, as detached and incompetent. While it is certainly possible for an adolescent to view the episodes of *13 Reasons Why* and not be moved to any sort of personal action, the emotional challenges that accompany normal adolescence lend themselves to the show being highly disturbing. This is especially true for a child/adolescent with already present mental/emotional health issues. While I am sure the vast majority of parents and guardians are aware of this series, I wanted you to know our district mental health professionals, as well as mental health professionals across the country, are deeply concerned about *13 Reasons Why* and would recommend against viewing the show.

There have been numerous media reports the last several weeks about an online game Blue Whale Challenge. According to media reports, this game originated in Russia, has spread to Europe and is making its way to the United States. It is reported the game is designed to manipulate vulnerable adolescents and young adults to commit suicide after a series of personal challenges are fulfilled. At this time, there are no confirmed suicides or attempted suicides in the United States that have been linked to the Blue Whale Challenge.

Regardless of the intent of those who produced *13 Reasons Why*, or if Blue Whale Challenge is an actual online game, the fact is these two items are a topic of discussion among

adolescents/young adults. If you as parent or guardian have any further questions, we would encourage you to contact our Counseling Services Department within the school system. You may call 767-8000 and ask for either Kirk Hollis or Kathryn Metzger. Mr. Hollis and Mrs. Metzger can also direct you to various services within the community to assist you in gaining support for a child/adolescent struggling with emotional well-being. As a district, we are committed to insuring students' emotional needs are met in addition to their need for academic success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Pennington". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

David Pennington, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

DP/bj