



Bethalto Community Unit School District #8

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I think we would all agree that there is no more challenging task than raising a family, especially in today's world. Our children have 24/7 access to the internet and social media, bombarding them with conflicting messages, sometimes hateful and hurtful. Sadly, our children can be desensitized to things that we as adults may consider unethical, immoral, illegal, or just plain shocking. With summer upon us, and our children having more downtime and freedom, we wanted to take this opportunity to reach out to our Bethalto families. We continue to hear of more teen suicides across the country linked to a recent Netflix Series, titled, 13 Reasons Why, so we felt it was important to provide you with some additional information regarding protecting our children in this always connected world.

With all the potentially negative messages from the internet and social media, the reality of today is that we as adults must work daily to protect our children. We cannot make the assumption that our children are capable of "getting it." As you are aware, children, especially adolescents make decisions "in the moment" through peer pressure, from wanting to be liked or to fit in, by believing the media about what they should be, and frequently from observing others much like them-either virtually or in reality. With the end of the school year upon us and our students having more unstructured time, we would like to share some information to consider during the summer months.

Social Media

As social media allows us to connect with others, it erases the geographic distance between friends and relatives and makes the world a truly global community. However, it can also provide a platform for threats, bullying, promiscuity, and more. Social media can also blur the line between friends in reality and virtual “relationships.” As social media can sometimes be both socially and emotionally damaging to students, please consider the following:

- Create ground rules. If your kids are old enough to be using the computer, they are old enough to understand that there are rules they need to abide by. The best way for families to agree on ground rules is to create a contract that all parties must sign. The Family Online Safety Institute offers a good example of a contract.
- Did you know that no one under the age of 13 is permitted to join Facebook? It ultimately should be the parent who has the say on when and if the account gets created.
- Use Filtering Software. There are software suites you can purchase to monitor your child’s Internet usage, such as Net Nanny and PureSightPC, and your child’s cell phone with My Mobile Watchdog. You can also install parental controls on your home network.
- Remind your kids that the Internet is not private. Information or photos shared on even the most locked-down social media profile is at risk of being exposed at some point. Discuss the concept of good judgment—tailoring the conversation to your children's ages—and discourage them from social media to bully or gossip about others. “Think twice, post once” is always a good policy.
- Teach your kids about an on-line reputation. Your kids need to know what a digital footprint is and the impact inappropriate messages or images could have if a future college administrator or employer

were to stumble upon them. What goes online, stays online.

- Parents also can help keep kids grounded in the real world by putting limits on media use. Keep computers in public areas in the house, avoid laptops and smartphones in bedrooms, and set some rules on the use of technology (i.e. such as no cellphones at the dinner table).

Netflix Series – 13 Reasons Why

The potential damages of social media can be compounded by other influences, such as the recent Netflix series, 13 Reasons Why. This series is causing concern by school districts across the country. Below are the excerpts from a New York superintendent released this past week. His message sums up the concerns and offers you an opportunity to learn more about this series to help you decide as to whether to allow your child to view this series.

I am writing today to share concerns about a television series students may be watching. While many consider the video streaming service, Netflix, as “just another TV channel,” it is a paid subscription service and therefore not subjected to the same FCC regulations and content rating system as broadcast TV.

Netflix recently began airing an original series entitled, 13 Reasons Why, based on the young adult book with the same title by Jay Asher. The novel was intended for young adults; however, 13 Reasons Why contains mature subject matter including graphic depictions of rape, substance abuse, cyberbullying, bullying, voyeurism, and suicide. 13 Reasons Why is about a teenager who takes her own life, but before doing so methodically records audio messages for the 13 people she feels in some way played a role in her decision to commit suicide.

This series has been available on Netflix since the end of March. Former Disney child star, Selena Gomez, is credited as a producer. With her name attached, 13 Reasons Why may reach a much younger audience than anticipated. Middle and High School students are likely aware of the series and may have even watched some, or all the episodes.

It is important for you to be cognizant of its availability, allure, content, and popularity. The series romanticizes suicide as a viable option, portrays school support staff as being non-responsive to students in need, and does not offer any appropriate responses or advice for students who may be in crisis.

A concern in the series 13 Reasons Why is that school personnel is portrayed as non-responsive and ineffective. However, if a student is in crisis, seeking professional help is imperative to addressing the situation. The Bethalto School District has many resources available to assist students and families. These professionals are available for emotional support to families and are extremely knowledgeable of local resources tailored to address each specific situation. Administrators, teachers, school social workers, psychologists, and nurses are on hand daily to serve those in need. Here is a list of Social Workers available in each of our buildings:

Dawn Reising—Bethalto East
Patti Jordahl—Parkside, Meadowbrook
Eileen Broske—Trimpe Middle School
Janet Craig—Civic Memorial High School

As reported by the Belleville News Democrat in April of 2016, “Madison County residents are buying opioid prescriptions at a rate that soars above the national average, according to new data from federal agencies.” Opioid prescription abuse can often times lead to heroin addiction, as stated by the Madison County Heroin Task Force in the article. In an effort to take a preventative approach, we recently were invited by Chestnut Health Systems to be a part of a grant opportunity for this region whereby counselors from Chestnut will come into our middle school to address this important topic. The lessons will revolve around the topic of youth prevention education, specific to the harm of drugs and addiction in our Health classes at TMS. The curriculum developer highly recommends that we present the material in two consecutive years, so we will present it in both 7th and 8th grade. Both 7th and 8th grade contain 11 lessons (10 in the original curriculum and one

additional relating specifically to opioids). Chestnut will provide assistance in working with our high school peer leaders in a Youth Advisory Council. This group would advise and plan substance abuse prevention activities for their peers. They will also help us with planning for communication campaigns for high school students and parents. Keep in mind, they already work with our high school in other capacities, but now we will have the opportunity to access their services at the middle school as well. In addition, fifth graders in Bethalto participate in the Drug Abuse Resistance Education, otherwise known as the DARE program, offered by our local law enforcement. We will provide more information as it becomes available and once we receive notification from Chestnut that the grant was approved.

Let's Work Together

Bethalto is a great community. As a school, we are extremely fortunate to have an array of resources available, including local law enforcement, to help us protect our children. I am including links to several other excellent educational resources to assist you as a parent.

-The Teen Brain: Six Things to Know-Published by the Department of Health and Human Services (attached)

-National Institute of Drug Abuse –<http://www.drugabuse.gov/> -
Common Sense Media-resources about online bullying, social media, cell phones, and more - <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>

Respectfully yours,

Jill Griffin