



Aitkin Public Schools

306 SECOND STREET N.W. • AITKIN, MN 56431 • 218-927-2115

BERNARD F. NOVAK
Superintendent

PAUL KARELIS
High School Principal

JESSE PETERSON
Elementary Principal

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Assistant Principal

April 27, 2017

RE: Websites to Be Aware of

To: Parents of Aitkin School District # 1

The school administrative team has become aware of some alarming media that are potentially dangerous to our students. This media deals with the topic of suicide. This is extremely concerning and can have serious impacts to students who can be vulnerable or influenced by these types of messages as they grow and develop into adulthood. Schools across the nation are dealing with this same issue and we are aware of this situation and request your help to ensure the safety of our students by taking the time to speak with your students about how these types of media can have some tragic effects.

There is a NETFLIX clip series called “13 Reasons Why”, in which a teen has completed suicide. Why is this NETFLIX series controversial? It has been pointed out that throughout the series, there are instances of sexual assault, rape, underage drinking, driving under the influence, body shaming, and ultimately, graphic scenes depicting the teen’s suicide.

If you as a parent choose to allow their child to watch “13 Reasons Why,” we offer these tips:

- 1) Start with an open conversation:** Ask your child have you heard of this show? Have you watched it? How did it affect you? And really listen because it might provide a window into some of their own thoughts and feelings and which themes they gravitated toward the most.
- 2) Watch with your child:** Watch it together every few days and talk about it while watching it.
- 3) Educate yourself on suicide prevention:** It’s really helpful to know basic facts and how to approach a conversation about 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.

It has also been brought to our attention, there is a new trend through the internet of a game called the Blue Whale Challenge. Participants sign up, are contacted by someone, given daily "challenges" to complete for 50 days. Participants are required to take pictures and share them with the online person to confirm they completed the daily task. On the 51st day the final task is to complete suicide. Participants are told once they sign up they have no choice but to complete the challenges or they will be found/tracked down and killed. Also, apparently, someone could sign up another person for the "challenge" if he/she knew enough info about that person.

Other aliases for this game are: A Silent House, Sea of Whales, Wake Me Up at 4:20am

Please take the time to have an in-depth conversation with your students about these kinds of media and other websites that they may be viewing on their phones and other electronic devices. We are concerned about these websites and other forms of media and how they can have an extremely negative influence upon students and community. We have informed local and county law enforcement agencies about this issue. Student safety is our top priority and we hope you will talk to your students. If you have any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of your student, please feel free to contact a building administrator, counselor or social worker so we can address your concerns.

Resources on suicide prevention:

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Local Resources:

- Crisis Line, available 24 hours: 218-828-4357
- Text4Life, available 24 hours: Text "LIFE" to 61222
- Aitkin High School Counselors: Sammy Croatt 218-927-7124 and Meredith Sander 218-927-7108, available during the school year 7:30am-3:30pm
- Rippleside Elementary Social Worker: Julie Jensen 218-927-4838, available during the school year 7:30am-3:30pm
- Riverwood Healthcare Center Emergency Room, 218-927-2121
- In case of an emergency, dial 911

Thanks,

ISD # 1 Administrative Team and Student Support Staff

Bernie Novak, Superintendent
Paul Karelis, HS Principal
Chad Pederson, HS Assistant Principal
Jesse Peterson, Elementary Principal
Jason Cline, Athletic Director
Jen Burgos, School Nurse
Tracy Benz, School Nurse
Julie Jensen, Elementary Social Worker
Sammy Croatt, High School Counselor
Meredith Sander, High School Counselor