



CENTRE FOR  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION

# Aboriginal Youth Cyber-bullying

A special feature presentation based on the Centre for Suicide Prevention online course River of Life: Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention

***“Bullying is a problem for all kids, but it may be an even bigger problem in the Native American [Aboriginal] community”***

*– Tanya Lee, Indian Country Today, May 30, 2011*

By Suzanne McLeod, BA, MA, Curriculum Developer

Social media sites, such as Facebook, mySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr, Messenger and cell phone texting, have become a large part of the way in which Aboriginal youth today “talk” and socialize with each other (Brown, Cassidy, Jackson, 2006). From this, cyber - bullying has become an increasing reality among youth.

***Research shows that youth who have been bullied are at a higher risk for suicide ideation and thoughts, attempts and completed suicides. Bullying contributes to depression, decreased self-worth, hopelessness and loneliness*** (Hinduja, Patchin, n.d.).

**Cyber-bullying** is “the use of the internet, cell phones, texting and other technologies to send cruel, untrue, or hurtful messages about someone or to someone that causes harm” (Brown, Cassidy, Jackson, 2009).

**“Cyber-bullies”** use emails, webcams, text messages, chat rooms, camera phones, blogs, websites, etc to spread derogatory, insulting, excluding or threatening messages and/or images. **Most bullying occurs between the ages 13 and 14 then usually decreases around ages 15 to 16.** This

includes both perpetrators and victims (Brown, Cassidy, Jackson, 2009).

“Cyber-bullies” feel that they are **anonymous**, giving them a sense of power and control that allows them to do and say things they would not normally say in the “real world.” In cyberspace, literally hundreds of perpetrators can get involved in the abuse (Hinduja, Patchin, n.d.). **Aboriginal youth who are the victims of bullying experience the same feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness as if they were being bullied face-to-face!** Because of the all-encompassing nature of the internet and cell phones, it is harder than ever for victims to escape their tormentors. **It can happen anywhere**—at home, at school, at anytime of the day or night (Brown, Cassidy, Jackson, 2006). In extreme cases, victims have been known to become aggressive and fight back, or to become depressed and attempt suicide.

Aboriginal youth who have experienced cyber-bullying were almost TWICE as likely to attempt suicide compared to those who had not (Hinduja, Patchin, n.d.).



## **CYBER-BULLYING CAN TAKE ON DIFFERENT FORMS:**

(Cyber Bullying <http://www.mesaaz.gov/police/TeenConnection/CyberBullying.aspx>)

- **Flaming**

Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language

- **Harassment**

Repeatedly sending nasty, mean and insulting messages via email, instant messages or text messages

- **“Dissing”**

Dissing someone online; sending or posting gossip or rumours about a person to damage their reputation or friendships. This includes creating websites to make fun of another person (ie. a classmate or teacher) or using websites to “rate” people as prettiest, ugliest, etc.

- **Impersonation**

Pretending to be someone else online and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger, or to damage that person’s reputation or friendships

- **Outing**

Sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information or images online or sending it to others

- **Trickery**

Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online or sending it to others

- **Exclusion**

Intentionally and cruelly excluding—shutting out—someone from an online group

- **Cyber Stalking**

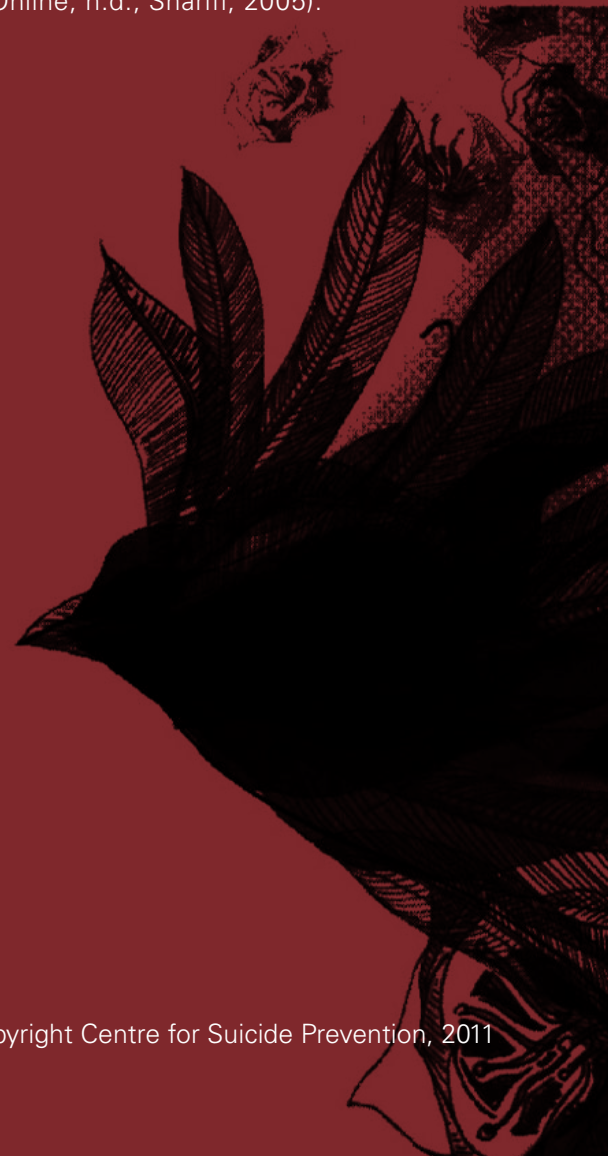
Repeated, intense harassment and dissing that includes threats or creates significant fear

## **Adults or parents don’t always recognize how devastating cyber-bullying can be for youth.**

One study shows that only 10% of parents believe their children have been bullied online, while 40% of kids reported they had been victims (Brown, Cassidy, Jackson, 2009).

Consider that research shows that **99% of teens use the internet on a regular basis**, and 74% of girls aged 12-18 spend more time on chat rooms or sending text messages than doing homework (Shariff, 2005).

Because people can be “anonymous” on the internet, Aboriginal kids don’t always know who their tormentors are. At an age when peer acceptance is crucial, the internet becomes the perfect medium for adolescent anxieties to play themselves out, sometimes **resulting in suicide attempts or loss of a child** (Secret Life of Kids Online, n.d.; Shariff, 2005).



## THE ONLINE WORLD

(Calgary Police Service, Safe Surf from Youthlink Calgary)

The online world can be **exciting and addictive!** You can keep in touch in with friends and family at any time, and make friends with people anywhere in the world. **But be aware and be safe!**

- **Social Networking**

Facebook, MySpace, Live Journal...all social networking sites that allows users to make their own personal profiles and web pages dedicated to their lives and then share that information through emails, by posting photos and videos, and by expressing personal views.

- **Chat Rooms**

There's a chat room for almost any interest! A chat room is like a giant online coffee shop where users from all over can go to "talk" and meet new people online. Conversations are instant (just like instant messaging) but everyone in the "room" can see it.

- **Instant Messaging**

Instant messaging allows you to text messages to family and friends in "real time" so it's like you're talking face-to-face.

- **Online Gaming**

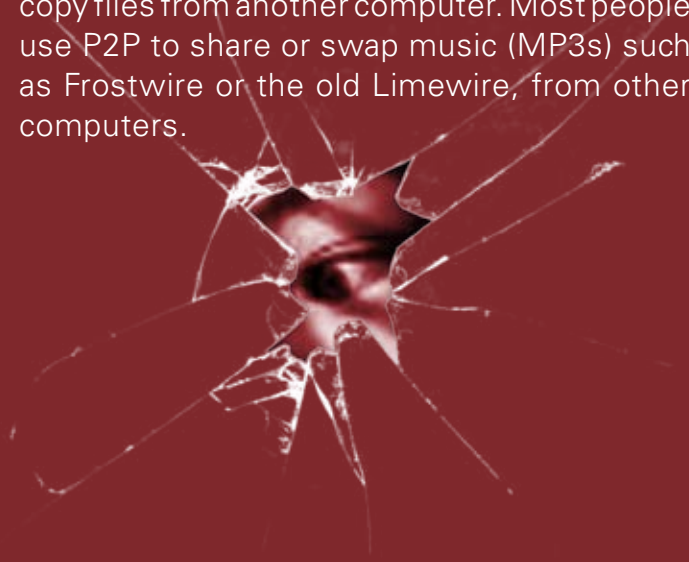
Online gaming is like playing a regular video game but instead you're playing online. Gamers can play games from all over the world, play alone or become part of a "team" to defeat enemies or "talk" in real-time with text and voice capabilities.

- **Email**

Instead of mailing letters or notes to family and friends, you can write them electronically, hit "send" and have them received almost instantly.

- **File Sharing**

File sharing (a.k.a peer-to-peer or P2P technology) allows users to search for and copy files from another computer. Most people use P2P to share or swap music (MP3s) such as Frostwire or the old Limewire, from other computers.



## 3 Rules for staying safe!

**Remember, not everyone on the internet is there to have a good time. Some people lie about who they are or are there to bully others. Know how to stay safe!**

- 1. Never give out your full name, or real name, or personal information like your home address or phone number.**
- 2. Stop, block or tell a trusted adult if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or threatened.**
- 3. Treat other users online the way you want to be treated. Don't use nasty messages, jokes, videos or photos.**

## FOR ADULTS, TEACHERS AND USERS- SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLUTIONS TO CYBER-BULLYING

**The following suggestions are provided in regards to cyber-bullying, in schools and at home:** (Brown, Cassidy, Jackson, 2009; Stop Cyberbullying, n.d.)

- Set up anonymous phone line so students can report cyber-bullying.
- Have a zero tolerance policy towards cyber-bullying.
- Educate students and parents about cyber-bullying.
- Create self-esteem in students through extra-curricular activities.
- Implement age-appropriate suicide awareness into any anti-bullying program.
- Don't respond to mean messages; show it to an adult.
- Before hitting "send" ask yourself how you would feel if you received the message.
- Monitor online and offline behaviours of youth.
- Tell your child you won't blame them if they are cyber-bullied. Emphasize that you won't take away their computer privileges (this is the main reason why kids don't tell adults when they are cyber-bullied).

## **Remember to KEEP IT LEGAL!**

**Youth do not always recognize the legal consequences of cyber-bullying.** Between 46-50% of youth mistakenly believe they have the right to say anything online because of freedom of expression, leading some to exceed legal behaviour under the Canadian Criminal Code and/or Human Rights Act. (Brown, Cassidy, Jackson, 2009)

In Canada, cyber-bullying can be addressed under civil law or criminal law. *Under civil law, a person can be charged with defamation (slander or libel); under criminal law, a person can face harassment charges or defamatory libel. Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, freedom of expression is guaranteed "subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society"* (Cyberbullying and the Law, n.d.)

The U.S. Department of Justice says that crimes related to **bullying in Indian country** include assaults, extortion, sexual offenses, shootings, murders, stabbings, threats, thefts and vandalism.... "[it is] a gateway behaviour. **Bullies go on to commit more serious crimes...**consequences for victims are also dire: they include low school achievement, low self-esteem, depression, drug and alcohol use, self-hurting behaviours and suicide." (American Indian Programs Target Bullying)





***“Being Virtually Bullied”***

(Windspeaker AMMSA “Kind and Considered Response to Grown Up Experiences,” August 2011)

**Dear Auntie:**

I thought I had good friends, but recently on Facebook there have been a few people talking about me and spreading bad rumours. I don't want my friends and family to believe what these people are saying about me, but if I answer the rumours on Facebook the comments and lies about me just get worse. I feel like things are getting out of control and I am powerless to stop it. What should I do? I'm very upset about this.

**Signed, Virtually Bullied**

***Auntie's Answer:***

Whether you are in a small village or living in the urban rez there is a wounded part of our community....being different, new or returning to the community, single or educated can be among the many reasons to be a target...rumours are not cultural. Stay out of harm's way and surround yourself with family and friends that show you unconditional love and respect...perhaps as for support from people or service providers to organize workshops on how to handle cyber bullying.

## RESOURCES FOR ABORIGINAL YOUTH, PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

**“How the Moon Regained Her Shape” by Janet Ruth Heller** – This is a teaching story about how to overcome bullying. The once-brilliant moon is bullied by the mean-spirited sun and becomes sullen, unable to dance across the sky. A comet, a positive warrior figure, embraces the moon and takes her to a healing woman who teaches her how to overcome the sun’s harsh words with the help of caring friends and inner strength.

**“Fatty Legs, A True Story” by Margaret Pokiak - Fenton and Christy Jordan - Fenton** – This is a true story about a young Inuvialuit girl named Olemaun, later named Margaret Pokiak. Olemaun grew up in Banks Island in the Northwest Territories where her family lived by hunting and trapping the land. From age 8 to age 12, Olemaun was sent to a residential school in Aklavik. She was targeted by a nun who would bully her and embarrass her in front of everyone. Olemaun’s story is about empowerment, courage, endurance and overcoming oppression at such a young age.

**“Native American Youth Narrates Suicide Prevention”** – Indian Health Service <http://www.ihs.gov/PublicAffairs/DirCorner/index.cfm?module=blog311p1>

**“Creating Caring Communities Bully-Proofing Your School”** – This is a 3-year school-based pilot program created by the Indian Health Service and Watersmeet Township to reduce the violent and bullying behaviours of Native students. The program has expanded to include K-12 schools serving the Chippewa, Oneida, Stockbridge-Munsee, and Potawatomi nations (refer to “American Indian Programs Target Bullying” in bibliography).

## ONLINE SOURCES

### **Be WebAware - Cyberbullying**

[www.bewebaware.ca/english/cyberbullying.html](http://www.bewebaware.ca/english/cyberbullying.html)

### **Bullying Canada**

[www.bullyingcanada.ca](http://www.bullyingcanada.ca)

### **Bully Free Alberta**

[www.bullyfreealberta.ca/cyber\\_bullying.htm](http://www.bullyfreealberta.ca/cyber_bullying.htm)

### **Be Free**

[www.b-free.ca](http://www.b-free.ca)

### **Cyberbullying**

[www.cyberbullying.org](http://www.cyberbullying.org)

### **Team Heroes**

[www.teamheroes.ca](http://www.teamheroes.ca)

### **Honouring Life Network**

[www.honouringlife.ca](http://www.honouringlife.ca)

**crimes overcome  
depression suicide  
free victims**

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