

Combatting Cyber-Bullying in the NWT

Mr. Speaker, today is national Pink Shirt Day. I applaud all Members for wearing pink in the House today to symbolize that we will not tolerate bullying of any kind.

The internet has opened an invaluable connection to the world by allowing residents of all ages in even our smallest communities' access to information and opportunities easily. Sadly, it has also allowed bullying to move online.

Cyber-bullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. The intention is to cause harm or distress to the victims. Most often, it is sustained and repeated over a period of time and can damage a person's feelings, self-esteem, reputation and mental health.

Cyber-bullying includes:

- Sending mean or threatening emails, text or instant messages;
- Posting embarrassing photos of someone online;
- Creating a website to make fun of others;
- Pretending to be someone by using their name; and
- Tricking someone into revealing personal or embarrassing information and sending it to others.

Mr. Speaker, cyber-bullying affects victims in different ways than traditional bullying. Unlike face-to-face bullying, cyber-bullying can be relentless and can follow a victim everywhere 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Because cyber-bullying can spread quickly, to a wide audience, most teens today have been involved in some way or other, either as a target, as a bully, as a silent observer, or as someone who participates on the sidelines and becomes part of the problem without realizing what they are doing.

As well as being traumatic, people need to know that forms of cyber-bullying can be illegal. There are repercussions to these actions. Repeated tormenting online can amount to criminal harassment. Threatening to share someone's personal information with others can be extortion or uttering threats. Fake profiles created to ruin or damage someone's reputation could result in charges of identity theft or fraud, while spreading untrue rumours may be defamatory libel. The sharing of intimate images of people may be illegal under the Criminal Code of Canada. The sharing of intimate images of youth, even solely among youth, may also fall under the Criminal Code's provisions relating to child pornography.

I encourage anyone who is experiencing these types of incidents to report it to your local RCMP or to Cybertip.ca. If you are being bullied online, know that every social media site has the ability to report and block the culprits. Phone service providers will take reports of unwanted text messages. Don't respond to the cyber bullies, but don't delete their messages either as these will be useful to the service providers and the police as evidence. Be sure to talk to a trusted person or get any help or support you might need from those able to assist you.

Mr. Speaker, the RCMP plays an integral part in combatting cyber-bullying in our territory. I am proud of the efforts that the RCMP and its members have made in building relationships and trust in the communities they serve. In addition to investigating reports of cyber-bullying to determine if charges should be laid, RCMP members are also available to visit schools to speak to the youth about cyber-bullying.

Mr. Speaker, cyber-bullying is continually changing as new technology and social networking sites emerge. All residents need to stay alert to the presence of cyber-bullying. If you know someone who is a victim of cyber-bullying, talk to them and let them know that they can trust you and that they shouldn't deal with the bullying alone. Help them to report cyber-bullying to their telephone service provider or social media site, school administrators, or to the RCMP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.