

Bullies lurking in cyberspace

Cyber bullying up for discussion at East Pictou Middle School

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Kelly Joudrie, a school psychologist with the Chignecto-Central School Board, gets a large show of hands when he asks a group of Grade 9 students at East Pictou Middle School if they have ever been a victim of bullying. Sarah Regan - The News

SUTHERLANDS?RIVER – It's a sound familiar to most teenagers, one that alerts them that someone is trying to start a conversation.

That "you've got mail" chime often prompts interest and excitement. But for some, it ignites a sense of fear that they are about to be cyber bullied.

Cyber bullying is something April Gosbee knows a lot about. The Grade 9 student at East Pictou Middle School says her classmates often bully her over the Internet.

"I use MSN and Facebook everyday. This one student I used to go to school with sometimes posts nasty messages calling me fat. I try to ignore it. I know it's just their own insecurity."

The middle school hosted a Stand Up Against Bullying Day Friday. Each student at the school wore a pink tee shirt to show their participation. They spent the day attending bully prevention sessions.

In December, three East Pictou Middle School students were arrested for threatening, harassing and assaulting another student. Pictou County District RCMP were called to the school to investigate and found that one of the students had been a target of various incidents over the past three and a half weeks.

Gosbee says she is a friend of the boy who was being bullied and says she believes he was bullied at school, as well as over the Internet.

"MSN and those chat rooms are a source of rumours and, in some cases, the source of suicide," Kelly Joudrie, a school psychologist with the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, told a class Friday. "It gives the bully reckless abandon. They feel as though they can say anything and do anything without consequence."

Cyber bullying is on the rise in Pictou County, says Const. Ken MacDonald, New Glasgow Police Service. He says this form of bullying has become more common with the popularity of e-mail, chat rooms, discussion groups and instant messaging.

"Lately, we have been getting more reports of cyber bullying. Basically, technology acts as a shield, allowing bullies to target the victim without confrontation."

A 2005 Media Awareness Network survey showed that 34 per cent of Canadian students have been bullied and 27 per cent of those kids were bullied over the Internet.

"For many children, home is no longer a place safe from the peer pressures of school," MacDonald said. "It's important for people to report if they are being bullied. We can't do anything if we don't know about it."