

Cyber-bullying becomes murder conspiracy by teens (CTV broadcast transcript)

CANADA AM

Broadcast Date: Thursday, April 27, 2006

THOMSON: Threats made in the virtual world ended with some very serious real-life charges for two Ontario teenage girls. The Grade 9 students are accused of conspiracy to commit murder after allegedly threatening to harm at least 15 students and teachers through the Internet. Joining us now with more on cyber-bullying and what can be done to spot it and perhaps even stop it, or try to: Stu Auty, President of the **Canadian Safe School Network**. Thanks for coming in on this. When we hear about these cases and then the Medicine Hat murder and the kind of websites that we were learning about in that case and now these two Grade 9 girls that have been charged, do these cases surprise you?

AUTY: Well, really they don't, Beverly. I mean, technology has exploded in recent years. The kids are very aware of how to use that technology. Unfortunately, the parents aren't. And it's a child's world in many instances today, in terms of knowledge and awareness and how to manipulate it, the technology.

And so, it's really something that parents need to become more aware of, that schools and teachers need to become more aware of, so that an awareness can build to help these kids.

THOMSON: Bullying has been a problem, you know, almost since time began when we had schools. It's always been an issue. And there's been certain approaches taken, different campaigns taken. With cyber-bullying and the growth of the use of the Internet of kids and teenagers, the whole approach you would think we have to change.

AUTY: Well, yes. I mean, you're looking now at a chat room, for example. Kids can go to a chat room which is like a party. And it's a constant communication, a continual communication, that children are now engaged in. Whereas in days gone by, you know, a child on a Friday night would go to a party. And the parent would ask, "Well, who's at the party?"

THOMSON: Right.

AUTY: Well, today it's continual. "Who's in the chat room?" Well, we don't know. We do know that any chat room, the high probability is that somebody is out there that's a predator. Somebody's out there that's not there for any good will. And so, a child who's very vulnerable, who doesn't understand perhaps that world, particularly very young children, they need to be brought along. And it's a parent's responsibility to learn this new technology, as hard as it is. It's a parent's responsibility to learn it, to educate their very young child so that child grows up understanding who's in the chat room, who might be there and who might not be there.

THOMSON: Because of the anonymity that you can have on these sites, does it embolden those who might be bullies to use that tool?

AUTY: Oh, without a doubt. Without a doubt. And what's happening today, of course, is that that anonymity is allowing power -- where one child has power over another.

Of course, the reality is, when there is awareness, when a victim, for example, understands that they can go to an adult for help, that they can in fact pinpoint that bully, that cyber-bully, that's very, very important. Because keep the messages, for example. Keep the information, don't delete your e-mails if that's happening to you. Be aware of what you can do. Be aware of where to go for help. And in many cases we're talking about police action here. Where in fact there is a criminality or criminal element that's behind some of this stuff.

So, it's something that parents can make their children aware of, and teachers, so that kids, when they find themselves in this kind of a situation, all is not lost. There is help out there.

THOMSON: What can the teachers do? I mean, we've talked about the parents a little bit. But certainly there's computers in almost every classroom now. How do the teachers deal with it?

AUTY: Build awareness. Explain to the children exactly what a chat room is, if they don't know. I mean, children are vulnerable. Children are trusting. Children believe what they read often. And it's not that they shouldn't do that, you know. And they are brought along to -- wisdom comes with time. And so, a teacher can help provide that kind of wisdom through telling the children about a chat room, telling children about who could be in the chat room, telling a child about what they could expect. Why do they go to a chat room, for example? To meet people. It's a social-interaction place to be --

THOMSON: And they say personal things on the chat room.

AUTY: And they shouldn't do that. And what a teacher can do, for example, is explain to the child not to put personal information on that chat room. In other words, when you place yourself in that world with personal information, and in many cases some children are putting out pictures of themselves --

THOMSON: Sure they are, yeah.

AUTY: Now that's into the cyberworld. Well, they shouldn't do that. And that's simply a matter of instruction, where a teacher can help the child understand that world and the impact and the possibilities that can occur when they're there.

THOMSON: Yeah, because chat rooms are here to stay.

AUTY: They're not going anywhere.

THOMSON: They're not going anywhere.

AUTY: No, they're not going anywhere. And it's up to us to make sure that children are aware of that.

THOMSON: Stu Auty, thanks for coming in.

AUTY: A pleasure.

© 2006 CTV Television Inc. All Rights Reserved.