



- [News](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Radio](#)
- [TV](#)
- [My Region](#)

CBCnews

IN DEPTH

NEWS »

- [World](#)
- [Canada](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Arts & Entertainment](#)
- [Technology & Science](#)
- [Money](#)
- [Consumer Life](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Diversions](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Your Voice](#)

SERVICES »

- [Membership Sign-up](#)
- [Breaking News Alerts](#)
- [E-mail Newsletters](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Mobile/PDA](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Free Headlines](#)

INDEPTH: BULLYING

Cyber-bullying

CBC News Online | March 2005

Reporter: Joan Leishman
Producers: Lani Selick, Alison Hancock
Aired: Oct. 10, 2002 on The National | Updated March 2005

David Knight's life at school has been hell. He was teased, taunted and punched for years. But the final blow was the humiliation he suffered every time he logged onto the internet. Someone had set up an abusive website about him that made life unbearable.



David Knight

"Rather than just some people, say 30 in a cafeteria, hearing them all yell insults at you, it's up there for 6 billion people to see. Anyone with a computer can see it," says David. "And you can't get away from it. It doesn't go away when you come home from school. It made me feel even more trapped."

He felt so trapped he decided to leave school and finish his final year of studies at home.

These days the internet is a crucial part of teenage culture. Kids can't imagine life without it. They run home from school and the first thing they do is log on. They "talk" for hours using instant messaging, bulletin boards and chat-rooms. But the chatter and gossip can spin out of control, slip into degrading abusive attacks.

A recent survey found that 14 per cent of young Canadian users had been threatened while using instant messaging; 16 per cent admitted they've posted hateful comments themselves.

In David's case, the website about him had been active for several months before a classmate told him about it.

"A kid from school sent me a message on the internet saying, 'Hey Dave, look at this website,'" says David. "I went there and sure enough there's my photo on this website saying 'Welcome to the website that makes fun of Dave Knight' and just pages of hateful comments directed at me and everyone in my family."



Whoever created the website asked others to join in, posting lewd, sexual comments and smearing David's reputation.

"I was accused of being a pedophile. I was accused of using the date rape drug on little boys," says David.

MENU

MAIN PAGE:
BULLYING

HAZING: Passing on the rites

CYBER-BULLYING

RELATED:

INTERNET

COMPUTER SECURITY

Along with the website, there were nasty e-mails too.

David: "Here's an e-mail, 'You're gay, don't ever talk again, no one likes you, you're immature and dirty, go wash your face.'"

CBC's Joan Leishman: "Why do you think they were picking on you?"

David: "I don't know. I honestly don't know. I'm not different from any other kid."

At the Knight's home near Burlington, Ont., David's mother Nancy says one of the most frustrating aspects of the whole affair was that the bullies who went after her son hid behind the anonymity of the internet.



Nancy Knight

"It's a cowardly form of bullying," says Nancy Knight. "It's like being stabbed in the back by somebody (and) you have no way of ever finding out who they are, or defending yourself against the words they say. So it's more damaging than a face-to-face confrontation with somebody who is clearly willing to tell you what he or she thinks of you."

Nancy says the electronic bullying seemed to have a different affect on David than even the verbal attacks and bruises.

"After this bullying started, he began withdrawing completely, isolating himself from everyone," she says. "I guess it's a matter of not knowing who knows about you sort of makes you feel you don't want to know anyone."

Most adults don't understand how damaging cyber-abuse is. But a group of Grade 8 students at Deer Park Public School in Toronto says it causes deep emotional wounds.



Grade 8 students at Deer Park Public School

"This happened to a friend of mine," says one girl. "And people were sending her weird messages about her physical appearance and how she may have been overweight or not pretty and things that would hurt her feelings."

"One of my friends was checking his e-mail and it was kind of a threat, like me and my brother are going to beat you up," says one boy. "People may think it's funny, but actually it frightens people quite severely."

When the students are asked if any of them have used the internet to make fun of kids they know, one girl admits she has.

"Yeah. I used to be best friends with this girl and one night, me and my friends were just kind of, I don't know why, but we just decided to be kind of mean to her. We started calling her all these names and everything. After that, I regretted it. I tried to be her friend again, but she didn't want to because like she didn't want me to hurt her. So I guess I deserved it, but it made me feel really bad because I knew I shouldn't have done it."



"...it made me feel really bad because I knew I shouldn't have done it."

When David's parents learned of the website about him, they asked police to investigate, to try and find out who was behind it and have it removed from the web. But the site stayed up.

Detective Constable Kevin McCart won't comment on David's case, but he says, in general, internet bullying is tough to investigate unless it crosses the line into death threats or other criminal offences.



Detective Constable Kevin McCart

"It's an unfortunate situation, but quite often the hands are tied," says McCart. "There's nothing supporting a criminal offence by which we can investigate and obtain records and identify the person responsible for setting up the site."

As for schools, they often say their hands are tied, too. They usually want clear evidence the material is being sent from a school computer, and that can be hard to prove. All too often, students do their dirty work from home.

So where do you turn?

The Knight family found themselves trying to solve the problem on their own. Finally, Nancy contacted Yahoo, which in this instance was the website host.



"Hidden somewhere among the advertising on that website was a contact number down in California for the head office of this service provider, and so I phoned them and asked them if I could have this web page removed," she says. "I waited a couple of weeks and checked the web page and found that it was still there and so I called them again and asked them to take it down again, and again the same thing. Nothing happened."

Yahoo is just one of thousands of internet companies and most allow people to set up websites. They all have policies telling users not to post offensive material. But in reality, most of the time people can say whatever they want.

Yahoo wouldn't comment on the David Knight website.

Jay Thompson, president of the Canadian Association of internet Providers, says it isn't the job of the providers (the ISPs) he represents to decide what should or should not be on the internet.



Jay Thompson

"ISPs are not censors, they are not morality police, and we don't think Canadians want their ISP to be making determinations as to what is appropriate content for them or their families to view," says Thompson. "That is a decision to make in their own homes based on their own value systems and their own interests."

The champions of free speech on the internet strongly support this position.

"I think that free speech is an important value in Canada and I think that we should start at an early age to tell kids that this is an important value," says Jeffrey Shallit, who speaks for a group called Electronic Frontier. "When a person is in a position of authority says 'Look, you say this and I don't like it and therefore I'm going to censor it,' we are sending students really the wrong message. We are saying free speech isn't a value that we support."



Jeffrey Shallit

"It sounds trite but people say 'sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me,' and I think that part of the response should be to tell people, look, this is name calling, no one is coming after you with brass knuckles or a baseball bat."

David disagrees.

"That's very easy to say that censorship's a bad thing, but I don't think you'll ever understand how much it hurts until you see a website up there about your family," he says.

CBC's Joan Leishman: "This is the site that was posted about David Knight. What's your reaction?"



David Knight

Jeffrey Shallit: "My immediate reaction is that this looks pretty mild compared to some things I've seen. I've seen things far worse than this."

CBC's Joan Leishman: "But if that was posted about you child, how would you feel? What would you tell him?"

Jeffrey Shallit: "I'd be very unhappy. What would I tell him? I think I'd tell him the same thing, that people are jerks and people are mean and just ignore it. And who's going to be looking at this? It's not like the whole school is going to be logging on to see this. It's just the guy who wrote it and his small number of friends. So they can get their laughs and you just ignore it. You hold your head high.

"Freedom of speech protects the thought we hate just as much as the thought we like. It's not a pleasant lesson to learn all the time, but we know in societies where they don't allow freedom of speech that the consequences are much worse."

Still, the potential for kids to use the internet as a weapon for bullying is enormous. A recent survey found that:

- 99 per cent of Canadian students have used the internet.
- 48 per cent use it for a least an hour a day.
- Nearly 60 per cent use chat rooms and instant messaging.

"The internet has really given everyone a voice and they've decided to use that voice to either criticize people or make fun of them in some sort of way," says one of the students at Deer Park Public School in Toronto.



A student at Deer Park Public School

"(With) the internet, you can really get away with a lot more because I don't think a lot of people would have enough confidence to walk up to someone and be like, 'I hate you, you're ugly,'" says another student. "But over the internet you don't really see their face or they don't see yours and you don't have to look in their eyes and see they're hurt."

So why don't kids just turn the computer off, not read the messages at all? David tried that for a while but he says today kids can't just drop out of the wired world, nor should they have to.

"I should have a right to be able to log on to the internet or use my cell phone or check my e-mail without having people sending me those messages," he says. "I mean, sure you could just hide from everything, you could shut the door to your room and sit in a chair for the rest of your life, but that wouldn't work out too well."

How big a deal is this? Is it something students can read and forget or is it something that they find incredibly upsetting?

"It's a huge deal... it should be taken seriously," says one student.

"Even though they may not be getting physically hurt, a lot of people are getting hurt emotionally," says another student. "Sometimes when they're hurt physically, their scars will heal. But when you're hurt emotionally, that could stay with you for the rest of your life and you may be going to need help for the rest of your life and it may not ever heal."

"Eventually the Knight family did get Yahoo to take down the website about David. But it wasn't easy. It took seven months of messaging, phone calls and, the family thinks, the threat of legal action before it was removed.



David Knight piloting a plane

"When companies don't step in and say, 'You're not allowed to post this. We're gonna take it down,' basically they're promoting it, they're allowing it to go on," says David Knight. "The message is, 'Yeah, we agree with this and it's causing trouble for people, it's hurting.'"

David is now trying to recover from the bullying and beginning to realize his dream. He's learning to fly, hoping to become a fighter pilot in the Canadian Armed Forces. David's starting to soar beyond the nightmare delivered to him by the new technology that, now, all of our children have access to.

^TOP

SECTION TITLE:

Add content here specific to THIS PAGE ONLY, or delete block (will appear on this page only)

--LOCAL RIGHTSIDE BLOCK END-->

QUICK FACTS:

Add quick facts here


--RIGHTSIDE BLOCK END--> **NEWS ARCHIVE:**

[CBC Headline1 \(Date\)](#)

[CBC Headline2 \(Date\)](#)

--RIGHTSIDE BLOCK END-->

EXTERNAL LINKS:

 *CBC does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of external sites. Links will open in new window.*

[Bullying.org](#)

[Bullybusters.org](#)

[Dealing with bullies](#)

[Bully B'ware Productions](#)

[Stop Bullying Me](#)

[Electronic Frontier Canada](#)

[The Canadian Association of Internet Providers](#)


[Media Awareness Network](#)


[Alfred University study of hazing on college sports teams, 1999](#)


[Hank Nuwer's hazing site](#)

[Stophazing.org](#)

MORE:

 [Print this page](#)

 [Send a comment](#)

 [Indepth Index](#)

[Search CBC.ca](#)

[LOCAL](#) | [KIDS](#) | [RADIO 3](#) | [DIGITAL ARCHIVES](#) | [RADIO-CANADA.CA](#)

[About CBC](#) · [About CBC News](#) · [About CBC.ca](#) · [Jobs](#) · [Shop](#) · [Business Services](#) · [Contact Us](#) · [Help](#)
[Privacy](#) · [Terms of Use](#) · [Advertise With Us](#) · [Ombudsman](#) · [CBC: Get the Facts](#) · [Other Policies](#) · [Reuse & Permissions](#) ·
[Site Map](#)
Copyright © CBC 2009