THE SUICIDE OF AMANDA TODD

If you were to gather all the students in your school together in one room and ask them to put up a hand if they had ever been bullied, been a bully, or seen bullying happen there is a very good chance that every hand would go up. It's that big a problem. Bullying takes many different forms. We used to think that it was always physical – pushing and shoving and punching – or threats of violence, but we now understand it can be more than that. Insulting people and trying to make them feel badly because of their weight or skin colour or faith or culture or sexual orientation or the clothes they wear is also a form of bullying.

Remember what the young student said in the first video? He said that a punch may leave a bruise but it fades. Insults, though, bruise your heart, and it can stay bruised forever.

Bullying has been around for a long time, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't stand up for people who are being treated badly. Bullying is bad for everyone. It can do terrible damage to the person who is the victim. It makes them feel weak, helpless, and maybe even worthless.

For people who stand by and do nothing, their lack of action becomes a habit. Doing nothing is easy, and becomes easier with practice. Even worse, the silence of the bystander actually encourages the bully. "If nobody cares enough to stop me or say something or call a teacher or parent then I am safe. They must approve." Do you?

Bullying is even bad for the bully. It teaches him or her that cruelty and violence are good ways to get what they want. That's the sort of behaviour that eventually can lead to arrest, to a criminal record, and to a ruined life.

The internet and social media, for all of its benefits, provides another way that people can be attacked and bullied. The problem is so big that a 2016 study by Statistics Canada said that nearly one in five internet users between ages 15 and 29 reported having been cyberbullied or cyberstalked. Women and girls are twice as likely to be cyberstalked as men and boys.

Bullying is not a joke and it's not something that should be ignored. It can have real and tragic consequences.

Amanda Michelle Todd was 15 years old when she committed suicide at her home in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia.

Two years before, when she was in grade seven, she used video chat to meet people on the internet. A man she met online convinced her, after one year, to send him a photo of heself partially unclothed. The individual later blackmailed her with the picture and then posted it online. Amanda experienced serious depression after this abuse. Her family moved to a new home and Amanda to a new school. A year later, the stalker reappeared and created a Facebook page using Amanda's picture as the profile image. He contacted classmates at Amanda's school, sharing the image. Once again, Amanda had to change schools.

In the new school, Amanda made contact with an "old guy friend" who contacted her. A few days later, Amanda was assaulted by his girlfriend while others watched the attack. At home, Amanda attempted suicide by drinking bleach but survived the attempt. Amanda returned from the hospital to find hateful messages from her classmates, mocking her failed suicide attempt and encouraging her to try again. Desperate to give Amanda a fresh start, the family moved to a different city, but her stalker continued to pursue her, always finding her new school and then posting the video to students and even teachers.

Amanda must have felt that there was no escape and so she ended her life on October 10, 2012.

An international police effort later identified a 42 year old man in the Netherlands, Aydin Coban, as being Amanda's tormentor. She was not his only victim. In March 2017, Coban was sentenced to 11 years in prison for, among other things, possession and distribution of child pornography, (attempted) sexual assault and / or seduction, computer trespassing, and fraud.

To honour Amanda's memory, her mother founded Amanda Todd Legacy (amandatoddlegacy.org), a non-profit society that "focuses on awareness and the well-being of individuals with respect to prevention and awareness relating to bullying, cyber abuse and internet safety as well as resources and education that encourage mental wellness and healthy living."