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Dark Cloud: the high cost of cyberbullying
Discussion guide
Grades 9-12

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About the film

Dark Cloud examines a growing epidemic deeply affecting the mental, emotional and physical well-being of today's youth. The 45-minute documentary is told through the eyes of Carol Todd, TELUS Wise partner and the mother of Amanda Todd, the B.C. teen whose death by suicide after two years of bullying, exacerbated by a cyberstalker, became a flashpoint for global action around cyberbullying.

Dark Cloud introduces us to families who have endured similar experiences, as well as some of the most important anti-cyberbullying experts in Canada, including TELUS Wise partners Wendy Craig, Professor at Queen's University and Scientific Director of PREVNet, and Matthew Johnson, Director of Education at MediaSmarts. Weaving their expertise and experience together, Dark Cloud illuminates the statistics, clarifies the long consequences of cyberbullying, and shares insights into both cyberbullying's causes and its prevention.

Film facts

- Statistics Canada estimates that 41% of young internet users who experienced cyberbullying reported an emotional, psychological, or mental health condition.
- 60% of Canadian youth report seeing cyberbullying or online abusive behaviour within the last four weeks.
- 49% of LGBTQ+ students have experienced cyberbullying.

Discussion questions

1. Think about a time when you witnessed cyberbullying. How did you respond? How do you wish you had responded? What stopped you from responding that way?

2. Dr. Shaheen Shariff, Ph.D, and James McGill University Professor, states that the "key forms of traditional bullying are spilling back and forth from online and traditional." In what ways are traditional bullying and cyberbullying similar? In what ways are they different?

3. Matthew Johnson, Director of Education with MediaSmarts, notes that because we can't see facial expressions or body language online it's harder for us to feel empathy. Do you believe this to be true? Why or why not?

4. Do you believe that instances of bullying have increased and are worsened by the advent of digital media?

5. Dr. Wendy Craig of Queen's University says that one of the central challenges for addressing cyberbullying is that it's a 24-hour problem. For those victimized by cyberbullying, it's common to fixate on a cyberbullying issue and review the episode over and over again. Have you ever fixated on something online, whether it was negative or positive? If yes, how did digital media facilitate your fixation? Consider how the ability to see and relive an issue of cyberbullying would increase or decrease the negative feelings attributed to the issue.

6. Dr. Wendy Craig discusses a study in which a playground of preschool-aged children was monitored for instances of bullying. The study found that bullying was a significant problem and that peers stepped in to help more than adults did. Generally, when peers did intervene, they were effective in diffusing the situation. How important do you think it is to have peers step in when bullying occurs? Do you think that peers have more impact when diffusing a bullying situation? Why or why not? If you witnessed cyberbullying, would you intervene? Why or why not?

7. Brooke Boutilier and her mother raise the issue of Brooke's cyberbullying with the principal at her school, but the bullying continued. Do you think that it was a good decision to address Brooke's cyberbullying with school administrators? Why or why not? What do you think schools and communities can do to raise awareness about cyberbullying?

8. Was Dark Cloud effective in raising awareness about cyberbullying and its effects on youth? Why or why not? Did the documentary change your perspective on cyberbullying? How?

Additional resources

The following web sites have a multitude of resources, activities and lesson plans on cyberbullying and online safety:

telus.com/wise

Mediasmarts.ca

PREVNET.ca

amandatoddlegacy.org

riseagainstbullying.ca

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