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Fighting 'bullicide'

Woman crusades to prevent tormented victims of bullying from committing suicide

By **VIVIAN SONG**, TORONTO SUN

E-MAIL TO A FRIEND PRINT PAGE WRITE US LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Alexandra Penn is trying to prevent more families from losing their children to "bullicide" – tormented victims of bullying who commit suicide.

It was after speaking to parents like Cindy Wesley, whose daughter Dawn-Marie Wesley was 14 when she took her life, that Penn began to crusade against bullying.

Penn, also an active member during this month's National Bullying Awareness Week, and friend Delfina Moore have produced *The No-Nonsense Guide to Kids' Bullying Solution*, a CD aimed for students between grades 2 and 6.

The 10-step guide is targeted for parents, teachers, and health professionals and provides tips on signs of bullying and strategies on how to be pro-active against the growing problem.

"We believe we have to start early," Penn said. "It's much easier to prevent bullying than it is to work after the fact. That's just a bandage."

On Nov. 10, 2000, in Mission, B.C., Dawn-Marie hanged herself with a dog leash. She was found in her bedroom by her 13-year-old brother.

She left a suicide note naming three girls who had been threatening her at school.

The trial was a precedent-setting case for B.C. courts, which charged two of the three teens and grabbed major headlines.

Cindy, who left B.C. after the ordeal to live closer to her family in Woodstock, worked with Penn as an anti-bullying speaker for schools, parents and police forces and praised the initiative.

"I don't want another family to go through this or other children to feel like they have nowhere to go," she said.

The CD is also timely in Toronto, where 16 teens face charges of sexual assault and harassment after a 16-year-old girl came forward with the allegations this month.



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