

The Facts

- It is a disappointment, but it is not the end of the world.
- **The person who never made a mistake never made anything worthwhile.**
- Your child will also be upset and angry. Their behaviour may be masking something deeper.
- **By engaging with your child's school, you are bringing many resources into play. The school may be able to investigate, they will certainly be able to ensure your child gets extra support and care.**
- There is nothing worse for a child than thinking they have totally lost your trust. Some children who send unpleasant messages and get caught can need a great deal of nurture.
- **Small targets, regular celebration when they are met.**
- Every adult in your school will help you to resolve this.
- **If you handle this well, you can turn it into a very empowering experience... for all of you.**
- Involve them in the recovery plan. "What do you think we should do to make this better?" Imposing a course of action is not as effective as arriving at one together.

Further information

You may find these sites useful.

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety. (UKCCIS)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ukccis/>

Microsoft Windows Parental Controls

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-GB/windows-vista/Kids-online-A-parents-guide-to-monitoring-computer-use>

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection website (CEOP)

<http://www.ceop.gov.uk/>

The Byron Report (An investigation into online safety for children and young people by Dr Tanya Byron)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/>

Parent's centre (A government resource for parents who want to know more about e-safety.)

<http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/usingcomputersandtheinternet/>

My child has been sending unpleasant messages on the internet... **HELP!**

(A guide for parents and carers)

Remember!!!

Children are very comfortable in the world of the internet, emails, instant messaging and mobile phones. (sometimes called cyberspace) In many ways, they behave online in a similar way to they way they behave on the playground at school. **But there are far more good things that happen using the technology than bad things.** Please try and remember this as you talk to your child about what has happened.

Keep a cool head.

This might well have come as a nasty shock to you and you will be understandably upset, disappointed or angry. It is important to remember that children behave online like they would in the playground. Someone yells at them, they yell back. Someone hurts them, they may well want to hurt back either physically or with a well-aimed insult.

But the *language* my child used!!

Children learn far more language than you or their school taught them! Bad language is sadly commonplace in the media and even children's TV can set a bad example from time to time. Of course, you may well find it unacceptable and it needs to be addressed.

It's ok to show your disappointment. If you have been told (and perhaps even shown) that your child has been sending nasty, ill-mouthed messages via the internet or by text, then you need to let them know that you are disappointed in this behaviour. (In the behaviour, **not** them.) It is the

behaviour that you want to change. A sanction may be appropriate. Loss of a favourite video game or other treat is appropriate. You will know best what your child likes and what will have the most impact.

Give them a change to make it right.

It is of little value to demand that your child writes a letter of apology. They will do it if you make them, but it is far better if they do it because they have thought about it and mean it. Keep asking questions "How do you think the other person is feeling?" Don't be surprised if initially you get "Don't care". For a while, at least, your child will think that the trouble they are in now is the other person's fault for telling on them. They need to understand that the other person was hurt by this and wanted to make it stop. Now it has stopped that is a step in the right direction. Your youngster needs space to regain your trust, and to regain their own self esteem. The task in hand now is to build the future.

What if my "child" is actually a teenager, and the stuff they have been sending was pretty bad? Then your level of shock and disappointment must have been equally profound, but we still have to move forward. Your child may well have broken laws such as the Telegraphy Act which makes it illegal to send threatening, abusive or obscene messages. They may have breached the Computer Misuse Act too, and it is important they realise that this can have serious

repercussions. Even so, involving them in the recovery plan is far better than imposing one of your own. Deep down, they know they have messed up and what they are looking for often is a face saving exit.

Do I need to monitor what they do from now on?

Possibly, for a while at least. Don't forget that with Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7 you can create a user account for your child. You can limit when they can go online, what sites they can access, and the system can be set up to send you user reports so you know what sites they have accessed and what searches they have made. (It is common for companies to monitor staff use of internet and email and so this should not be seen as unusual.) In time you may want to agree an "Acceptable Use" agreement for your home. Your school can help with this as they have one already that you could base yours on.

Celebrate success.

It can really hurt when this kind of thing comes to light in a family, and you may hurt for a long time too. It is important to mark good progress in a way that shows you really appreciate it. Deep down, you may well feel like it should never have happened in the first place and you may still be very angry, but you need to take little steps. "Well done. Its been a week now with no problems." Followed by some positive reinforcement. Then a month later, the same thing.