



FACT SHEET FOR TEACHERS

Today children communicate and learn in ways unheard of ten or twenty years ago. Most changes have been positive. For example, information and communication technology (ICTs) such as cell phones and social networking sites, let children make friends, know more about the world, do research and get help with learning difficulties.

There are risks associated with this technology but the risks are about the way the technology is used and not the technology itself. Most of the risks are similar to those that children experience without the technology – such as bullying, sexual exploitation and abuse by adults and the criminal or risky misuse of personal information. Less risky behaviour, but very irritating and even disturbing, is the amount of time that children spend using cell phones or on computers.

Given these risks it is tempting to ban cell phones and the use of information and communication technology. But, as responsible adults, we have to remember that technology is not going to go away. It is a growing part of our children's future. We need to protect them by giving them skills to use the technology confidently, wisely and safely.

There are a number of things that a school / teachers can do to ensure this:

- 1** The school must develop a firm policy on the use of ICTs such as cell phones. It must have rules that are sensible, practical and enforceable. Have rules about cell phone use both in and out of school. For example, if students are caught cyberbullying or viewing pornography they should be dealt with the same way they would be disciplined if they were caught doing these in real life, including off school grounds. Make parents aware of the rules.
- 2** Teachers can use resource such as the *Understanding ICTS* fact sheet to understand how cell phones, computers and social network sites like MXit work.
- 3** Install social network sites, such as Facebook and MXit, on your own phone and computer, and learn how to use them. You will probably find it is not as difficult or unsafe as you think!
- 4** Encourage your students to use ICTs both confidently and safely and to see ICTs as something positive that they can control. Don't give the impression that ICTs are something complicated, dangerous and scary. Possibly one staff member could be responsible for promoting the safe use of technology for example, by holding student quizzes and keeping teachers informed of developments.
- 5** Teach Internet safety and responsible behaviour using ICTs the same way you would teach your students about for example, bullying, dealing with strangers and sexism. Essentially the same values and principles are involved. Discuss risks with your students so that they know the rules aren't because you don't trust them, but because you don't trust other people, similar to general rules for example, about dangerous behaviour, bullying or sexual harassment.

- 6 Show students how to use monitored search engines, or ones with adult controls. For example, a Web search site like Kid's Click at <http://www.kidsclick.org> is run by librarians.
- 7 Learn the skills yourself, and then teach your students practically how to block users and use privacy settings on applications such as MXit, Facebook and Twitter.
- 8 Hold ICT safety workshops for parents and children. The MXit team for example, is willing to visit schools.
- 9 Keep in touch with educational developments especially in ways that students can use technology for educational and fun purposes, such as mobile literature.
- 10 Be aware of gender issues around ICT use. All children, with help, can develop the same proficiency and confidence.

The following are resources you might find useful:

- www.mixit.com
- www.kidsamrt.org.uk
- www.thatsnotcool.com
- www.childnet.com
- www.teach-ict.com

