Teaching ethical technology behaviors
Head for the Edge, September 1998

Much to my children's embarrassment, I've never been shy about letting people know when I find their behavior impolite. My kids burrow a little deeper in their movie theater seats when I tell the talkers in front of us to pipe down. My son tries to look as unrelated to me as possible when I tell a group that their bad language is offensive. I've been known to explain to dog owners why they should pick up after their dogs, to students why they should say please and thank you to cafeteria helpers, and to smokers why they should believe signs that say "No Smoking." My children don't understand why I am not popped in the nose on a regular basis.

I don't really enjoy these little fits of Miss Mannerism, but I am firmly convinced that if everyone rationally admonished others of their bad behavior when they saw it, we would soon be living in a far more civilized world. As educators, this job of teaching polite, and more importantly, ethical behaviors, is not an option but our duty.

In direct and indirect ways, children begin to learn ethical values from birth. And while the family and church are assigned the primary responsibility for a child's ethical education, schools have traditionally had the societal charge to teach and reinforce some moral values, especially those directly related to citizenship and school behaviors. And since most of the ethical issues that surround technology deal with societal and school behaviors, they are an appropriate and necessary part of the school curriculum.

Business Ethics magazine suggests that businesses take a proactive approach to ethical issues. That advice is also good for schools and classrooms: Media specialists and teachers must:Articulate ethical values related to technology. Clearly display lists and create handouts of conduct codes and acceptable technology use. The "Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics" by the Computer Ethics Institute at < http://www.cpsr.org/program/ethics/cei.html> is a good list to use as a model.

- **Reinforce ethical behaviors and react to non-ethical behaviors.** Technology use behaviors should be treated no differently than other behaviors - good or bad - and the consequences of student behaviors should be the same. It is important not to over react to incidences of technological misuse.
- **Model ethical behaviors.** Students learn more from what we do than from what we say. All rules of ethical conduct we expect from our students, we ourselves must model. Verbalization of how we personally make moral decisions is a very powerful teaching tool as well.
- **Create technology environments that help students avoid temptations.** Computer screens that are easily monitored (no pun intended), passwords not written down or left easily found, and the habit of logging out of secure network systems all help remove the opportunities for technology misuse in the media center or classroom.

- **Encourage discussion of ethical issues.** "Cases," whether from news sources or from actual school events, can provide superb discussion starters and should be used when students are actually learning computer skills. Students need practice in creating meaningful analogies between the virtual world and the physical world. How is reading another person's email without their permission like and unlike reading their physical mail?
- **Stress the consideration of principles rather than relying on a detailed set of rules.**Although sometimes more difficult to enforce in a consistent manner, a set of a few guidelines rather than lengthy set of specific rules is more beneficial to students in the long run. By applying guidelines rather than following rules, students engage in higher level thinking processes and learn behaviors that will continue into their next classroom, their homes, and their adult lives. Here are mine:

Johnson's 3 P's of Technology Ethics:
1. *Privacy - I will protect my privacy and respect the privacy of others.*
2. *Property - I will protect my property and respect the property of others.*
3. *a(P)propriate Use - I will use technology in constructive ways and in ways which do not break the rules of my family, church, school, or government.*

- **Additionally, students' understandings of ethic concepts need to be assessed.**Technology use privileges should not be given to students until they have demonstrated that they know and can apply ethical standards and school policies. Testing of appropriate use needs to be done especially prior to student gaining on-line privileges such as email accounts or Internet access. The school should keep evidence of testing on file in case there is a question of whether there has been adequate instruction about appropriate use.

Schools also have an obligation to educate parents about ethical technology use. Through school newsletters, talks at parent organization meetings, and through school orientation programs, the school staff needs to inform and enlist the aid of parents in teaching and enforcing good technology practices.

As information professionals, we are in a unique position to remind other educators that it is not enough to teacher our students how to use technology, but we must also teach them how to use it well. But don't do it around your children. It's embarrassing!