

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Dealing with Digital Behavior Issues: A Parent Guide

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Growing up in the digital age is hard to do. Opportunities abound for mistakes. Sometimes those mistakes are public, involve schoolmates and can be potentially embarrassing. So what happens when your child makes a mistake online? Whether it's typing, posting, sending or receiving something inappropriate, whether it's going onto an inappropriate site or just clicking unknowingly, parents still need to maintain their composure to make each experience a learning opportunity for their children.

As Director of Technology at The Nueva School and a member of a working task force*, I helped to create this easy-to-remember parent strategy for handling children's computer-related incidents. I've reprinted it in its entirety below.

1. Practice P.O.I.S.E.

P = Pause

Pause before responding. Take a deep breath before getting excited or worried. Give yourself time to think objectively.

O = Open

Be open-minded. During the above pause, open your mind to different possibilities. What your child claims to have happened is just one perspective on what happened; what you see and interpret is another perspective.

I = Information Gathering

Find out and write down the facts.

- Note the date and time of when you first found out.
- Note the date and time of when the incident was supposed to have happened. Write down any accounts involved.
- What exactly happened? Be as detailed as possible.

- Get screen shots.
 - On a Mac: **Command+Shift+4** to click and drag areas of the screen you want to take. They will automatically be saved onto your desktop as "**Screenshot -- date/timestamp info.**" Hit the **Esc** button if you make a mistake and want to start again. Repeat for other relevant images.
 - On a Windows machine: Hit the **Prt Scn** button. Sometimes this requires holding down the **Fn** key. The entire screen will be taken and saved into RAM memory. Open Word or PowerPoint, choose **Edit > Paste** to paste the screen shot into the application. Repeat if necessary.
- Do not delete any emails or chat sessions, or destroy any evidence. Instead, see if you can try to save the content, whether through **File > Save As**, or through screen shots.
- What were some of the other circumstances surrounding the incident? Was there an incident at school or elsewhere that may have prompted this action?
- Who else may have seen this incident? Were there any online bystanders or witnesses? Who? List them.
- List any suspected offenders along with reasons why s/he would be suspected.
- Are there any assumptions you or your student have made about the issue or incident? List them.
- Write down any other pieces of information and/or thoughts that might help an investigation.

S = Seek a Teachable Moment

Sometimes, the teachable moment is not right after the event has occurred. It might be sometime afterwards when emotions are not as high. Comfort, console, encourage and seek to find another, more appropriate moment.

E = Educate and Encourage

Educate your student. Do not focus on just this one incident, but see if you can share other similar incidents or scenarios. Your student needs to learn about the ethical things to do if this situation or similar situations come up in the future. Remember to acknowledge, applaud and recognize all the good choices your student made throughout the incident -- whether that choice was telling you or not retaliating with further hurtful statements. Keep the lines of communication open and build those communication bridges. If you are at a loss for what to say or do, please feel free to ask your student's teacher, advisor, principal or head of school, or technology director.

2. Reporting to the School

If the incident involves another family within the school community, please email a brief summary or overview of the incident to your student's homeroom teacher and/or advisor. Include your findings from the information-gathering section of the P.O.I.S.E. model. Please also copy the appropriate school administrators and the technology director. If you believe the incident involves a student outside of your school community, copy that school's administration as well. Even if you believe this incident may not warrant school attention but might be significant in another context, it's important to send an email letting any appropriate parties know that the incident occurred.

Once you report an incident, wait for the school to perform its investigation. Speaking as The Nueva School's Director of Technology, I can say that we really do appreciate your efforts and are keenly aware of your concerns. While waiting, please refrain from contacting any other families that might be involved. Schools take these incidents very seriously, but it does take us time to collect additional data and/or other insights from the community, and to decide on an appropriate course of action. Meanwhile, seek that teachable moment for your student, and educate and encourage appropriately.

*Special note of thanks: My co-creators of this strategy include Don Orth and Kelly Scholten of Hillbrook School, Renee Ramig of Seven Hills School, Barbara Cohen of Marin Country Day School, Tom and Tibby Wroten of Sacramento Country Day School, and Darri Stephens of Common Sense Media.

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166

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Back to Top