

# Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties and ICT

JULY 2000

## About this information sheet

This sheet aims to provide you with:

- an introduction to the growing emphasis on the place of ICT for those with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD)
- a list of organisations, both voluntary and commercial, which provide information, advice, training, hardware or software relevant to students who have EBD
- details of some of the published sources of information and advice on ICT and EBD.

This sheet can be accessed on the Internet:

- in summary at: <http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/html/behav.html>
- in full as a pdf file at: <http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/pdf/behav.pdf>

## Introduction

The Audit Commission reports that 40,000 children a day play truant, 12,000 are permanently excluded and 150,000 are suspended for a given period of time. Even more worryingly, the Mental Health Foundation published a report in June 1999 called *Bright Futures* promoting the mental health of children and young people. The author, Helen Kay, claims that one child in five is likely to suffer from psychological problems before the age of 20. This is a timely reminder that not all children with EBD are violent. On the contrary, there are many who are withdrawn, depressed and need emotional support.

For learners with EBD, ICT can provide a non-threatening environment in which to achieve success. For many, learning may have become associated with the fear of failure, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of those around them. The computer can provide a neutral setting in which to experiment, with students confident that they are controlling the pace and level of work. Many learners with EBD find it hard to establish relationships, and have little ability or perceived need to relate to others. Using a computer can avoid this problem and often offers an entry point for another person to join in alongside, in a non-threatening manner.

For some learners, the frustration of additional difficulties such as a specific spelling difficulty or poor co-ordination can intensify the feelings of defeat and low self-esteem. For these, ICT can remove the barriers to writing accurately and affect their attitude to learning as a whole. However, they may need extra support or training to establish a smooth routine for using the equipment.

## What technologies might help?

- CD-ROMs
- Interactive video
- Multimedia
- Scanners/video cameras and digitisers

Further details of what these technologies are and how they might help those with EBD are given on the general 'Special Needs and ICT', sheet but some specific examples are given in the section below for illustrative purposes. You should check on Becta's Educational Software database for fuller details on any titles cited below and to obtain a wider range of software products:

<http://vtc.ngfl.gov.uk/resource/esr/>



**British Educational  
Communications  
and Technology agency**

## How can ICT help?

There is no magic formula for solving the problems of young people with EBD. However, for learners with EBD ICT can provide a non-threatening environment. The computer provides a neutral setting in which to experiment so that students feel confident that they are in control. Many learners with EBD find it hard to relate well to other people and so find group work, turn-taking and being part of a class quite stressful. Use of ICT may remove discipline problems because it often changes the style of teaching. Instead of the teacher being the expert at the front who is seen as some kind of challenge or authority figure, the teacher is a guide and mentor so the use of ICT makes the relationship less confrontational. Teaching becomes more individualised with an accent on discussion and problem-solving, rather than passive listening.

For many young people, image is everything. They need to have the right clothes, labels and taste in music if they are going to be accepted and respected by their peers. Adult approval is not just irrelevant, it's a sign of failure! It is not 'cool' to be enthusiastic about anything and a cynical street-wise image is vital. ICT has a role to play because it has prestige. Whilst mobile phones and portable CD players are seen as essential accessories, dog-eared text books and dull exercise books simply don't 'cut it'. One useful product here is *The AlphaSmart 2000*, which is a computer keyboard with a word processing facility. It is lighter and less serious looking than a laptop but gives cheap access to word processing for pupils, and their work can easily be uploaded onto a desktop PC for editing and printing. The good news is that, unlike a lot of other equipment, this product is very robust, and schools report that it survives being transported in a rucksack or bag, banged down on desks and even dropped!

Within the field of EBD there are a number of specific roles that ICT can play as:

- an enabler which, in turn, gives access to learning or more appropriate learning environments
- a tool for the delivery of the curriculum and the development of ICT capability
- a tool for the management of behavioural modification approaches.

Changes in popular culture now mean that children process information in a different way from older people. They are the 'zapper generation', who have learnt to assimilate lots of short snippets of information presented at breakneck speed. ICT offers a dynamic, professionally designed environment, immediate access and fast results. Unlike textbooks, software can compete with television. *Talking Books* have been one of the most successful products for attracting children who have short attention spans. The stories are not just read aloud but also have hot spots which set off animations or sound effects or lead to other screens. The child has to click to make things happen and gets sucked into the world of the book. Favourites include *Rainbow Books* from Resource for young learners, and Broderbund's *Living Books*, particularly *Grandma and Me* and *Sheila Rae the Brave* for older learners, and Dorling Kindersley's *Castle Explorer* and *Stowaway*, where you really enter into the spirit of the age. TAG Developments have created school editions of some of the *Living Books*, and teachers have welcomed the lesson plans, extension ideas and curriculum links.

Students with EBD can benefit from the use of technological aids in the following areas:

- communication and self-expression
- problem-solving
- record keeping.

The rapid advancement of technology, the emergence of new technologies and their comparatively low cost is putting very powerful tools in the hands of the classroom teacher. Simulating real-life scenarios, interacting with words, pictures, video and high-quality sound, and producing documents of professional quality are now simple to do.

### ***Communication and self-expression***

The word processor provides learners with opportunities to experiment in the knowledge that, once they are happy with what has been written, they can print out their work in an attractive layout and type style. For poor spellers, the spellchecker or word bank gives confidence, enabling users to concentrate on the content of their work rather than the mechanics of the writing process. For students with poor handwriting, there is the assurance that the final product will look as good as their

classmates' contributions. For the learner who is unsure about the acceptability of his or her work, the computer constitutes a private world in which to experiment in safety. All these features combine to help students to gain in self-esteem and confidence in their learning.

The types of software package which may be greatest use in aiding communication and self-expression, and which are available for a wide range of machines and can be used by all learners, not just those with special needs, are as follows:

- Spelling
- Drawing
- Desktop publishing.

For students who are lacking in self-confidence or who are easily frustrated, the professional results these packages produce can give a real sense of achievement. Often, the learners are delighted by the appearance of their work and are prepared to try even harder. Many teachers report that pupils seem to have an increased attention span whilst working on a computer.

Of course, text entry is only a very small part of what pupils do. Pupils can create their own images with a digital still camera costing as little as £50-£70. For a long time now, schools and pupil referral units have been aware that pupils can produce wonderful work if they are given the chance to work with images and sound and now that the technology is within reach.

### ***Problem solving***

Often, students who have EBD are reluctant to take risks, test out ideas or enter into unfamiliar situations. Problem-solving develops self-reliance and confidence, and by helping the students to develop problem-solving strategies, staff may also be giving them a set of skills which could transfer to other areas of their lives.

The types of software package which may particularly help students with problem-solving are:

- adventure programs
- control
- Logo
- simulations.

Adventure games allow students to develop their problem-solving skills, to test out ideas and to think logically. Building and controlling models, and working with sensors to capture information about the weather, are ways of engaging young people in practical activities and giving them first-hand experience. Multimedia techniques, combining photographs and scanned images generated by the student or taken from outside sources, can be combined with recorded sounds and personal writing to create powerful images. In this way, students can reflect their own culture, enhancing their credibility with their peers and reinforcing positive self-images. Group work is often not easy for these learners, but the power of the computer to give instant feedback can give reassurance and encourage confidence in decision making. Such programs can often be used to develop social conventions like turn-taking and discussion. It is important to realise that adventure games and problem-solving activities can cause frustration if they are pitched beyond the child's capability to cope. However, it can be argued that it is better to give vent to these frustrations in a controlled environment where they may be more easily defused.

Adventure games often get a bad press, but they are highly motivating because, like multimedia, they are made by professionals and have a high-quality glossy image that is impossible for teachers to replicate. They encourage people to explore and try things out instead of being passive consumers. They are FUN, and encourage concentration, memory, recall and hypothesis. They help people to develop language skills and problem-solving strategies. As people share solutions and ideas, they have a reason to work together and communicate so they develop some social skills.

Certainly, as with *Living Books*, this medium appeals to young people because it absorbs them. For a generation brought up on Playstations who like to enter different worlds and take on different roles, this technology is really the baseline. One product, which combines an adventure game format with learning, is *Mission to Planet X*, part of the Internet Coach series. This takes the user on a quest

through cyberspace where they learn different functions of the Internet. The object of the adventure is to rescue Star Surfer from the aliens. And in the process they learn about surfing, downloading information, e-mail and safety issues on the Net. This program features live actors, stunning graphics, animations and audio. The good news is that you don't need an Internet connection, as Web simulations are used and the package comes with a set of lesson plans and worksheets relating to the National Curriculum.

Perhaps the most exciting area being developed by staff now is the use of creative tools for learners. Music technology allows pupils to explore and make choices about sounds. Many people with EBD would not have the patience or discipline to learn how to play a musical instrument. The frustrations far outweigh the delights. With recording equipment, they can record sounds and reuse them in different ways, or record a number of their own performances and collect the best parts. This means that they have the means of judging their own performance instead of being on the receiving end of judgement or criticism from others.

*Rock and Roll your Own* from Multimax is a bargain resource at around £10. It contains eight pre-recorded songs which are broken up into phrases. The user can put in sound and vocal s from keyboard or microphone to create a sort of sound collage. This can be recorded and saved. The program is designed for KS 2 and 3 and contains very little text, but in practice it has been used by a whole range of people, including adults.

*The Music Factory* from Widget Software for the PC gives pupils the chance to explore sounds and build compositions at quite a simple level. They start by choosing the music genre such as blues, reggae, techno or Salsa. They can choose up to six instruments to have in their band. Each instrument has a number of musical patterns that can be sequenced or played live. The output will always sound fine, no matter what the pupils have done, but really satisfying music can be created by carefully listening and considering the different combinations. The techno selection is very satisfying and perhaps has the most immediate appeal for this age group.

With MIDI and sequencing equipment, pupils can experiment still further. They can edit sounds and create new compositions. Add a keyboard and it is possible to try out different tempos and accompaniments. Again, the music technology is part of the real world outside the school gates. It offers street credibility as well as the chance to make something personal and meaningful.

### ***Record keeping***

Giving praise, when earned, and rewarding positive steps, either in terms of academic attainment or in attitude and behaviour, is an essential element of work with EBD students. If records of personal achievement are to have the maximum impact, they must:

- follow the achievement very quickly
- be well presented as a document.

The latter point is especially true with older students, to whom image and peer pressure are so important. Storage on disc also allows statements to be adapted for a range of uses and audiences. The same applies to Leavers' Profiles and Reports.

Profiling can have a major impact if used as:

- a formative tool
- to set targets for individual students through negotiation.

Used in these ways, profiling gives students some control and ownership in the learning process and thus increases the likelihood of their involvement in that process. If the profile content is based on attitude, behaviour and emotional state, then it can be used as a negotiating tool by providing the information on which to base the negotiation. It can also be used to give pupils clear guidelines and targets.

Since the primary aim in drawing up contracts and profiles is to gain the pupils' co-operation, it is advisable that they should have a say in the content. It is sometimes advisable to let them go away and draw up their own contract in private and then compare this with the teacher's version. A word processor enables the best parts of each contract to be 'cut and pasted' into a new file. This means

that both teacher and pupil have ownership of the final product and much useful negotiation will have taken place along the way.

Word processors can be used to store banks of statements or targets from which students and teachers can select in order to design an individual programme for the student. Using this technique, the statements can be personalised and printed out very quickly.

A number of commercial profiling packages are available which not only assist in formative profiling but which can also be used to produce reports. The reports can be designed for a range of audiences and be personalised to the individual student.

### **Are there any projects which have been run in this area?**

Sometimes, the technology is only part of the street-wise image. Many football clubs are now running study centres to attract young people to education. Leicester City Football club has provided sessions for 160 children a week from 11 schools. Primary children attend between 3.30 and 5.30, and older pupils work there from 5.30 – 7.30. The centre offers a whole host of up-to-the-minute technology, including digital cameras and interactive whiteboards.

At present, literacy and numeracy are their core activities, but soon they will be using virtual reality to encourage pupils to get to grips with French. The project is aimed at a range of pupils who need a boost to their education. Some are very able and need extra attention, while others need close supervision and have to learn to work in teams with other children. There is a mentoring system which offers high levels of personal support, with a ratio of about 1 helper to 4 pupils. Then, of course, there are the footballers. 'There is a mystique and magic about football'. said Gaynor Nash, the Study Support Centre manager at Leicester. 'As far as the children are concerned, they [the players] are gilt-edged and gold wrapped. They are stars and children are agog when they meet the footballers who they have seen on television or on the back page of a newspaper. When players come in, the level of enthusiasm rises and it is up to us to use the power of the technology to capitalise on this.'

### **Can Integrated Learning Systems (ILS) be of help?**

While we are concerned to motivate pupils, we also need to bear in mind that many of them need a structured program with regular rewards to keep them on task. Some schools feel that ILS systems are an ideal solution, as they give pupils the chance to work intensively for a short period and be tested regularly. *The Academy of Reading* from AutoSkill is described as a testing, training and management system for reading which provides instant feedback and rewards. Some pupils have made excellent gains in their reading age of up to two years in just a matter of weeks. Certainly, literacy and numeracy are likely to improve when pupils are cut off from distractions and unhelpful stimuli, and many like to get the printed certificates to show them what they have achieved.

### **Publications**

You should check the Bookshops link under 'Internet sources' (below) for a wider range of publications.

*Special Needs and ICT information sheet*

Becta. 2000, Free

<http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/html/senict.html>

Details generic special needs and ICT information. In particular, different types of software and hardware which can help, and lists of other sources of information such as organisations, publications and software.

*Principles into practice: effective education for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties*

Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), 1999 Reference no. HMI 177

This report can be copied from the OFSTED web site <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>, or a hard copy obtained from the OFSTED Publications Centre, P.O. Box 6927, LONDON E3 3NZ

### **Software**

You should check on Becta's Educational Software database for fuller details on any titles cited below and to obtain a wider range of software products: <http://vtc.ngfl.gov.uk/resource/esr/>

## Organisations

### **General**

Please note that, for brevity and ease of maintaining these sheets, the details of these organisations, central to the whole field of Special Needs, are given only in brief on this sheet, with the full details held on the main special needs information sheet entitled 'Special Needs and ICT'.

ACE (Aiding Communication in Education) Centre Advisory Trust

### **Specific to Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties**

Association of Workers for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (AWCEBD)  
Allan Rimmer, Administrative Officer, Charlton Court, East Sutton, MAIDSTONE, Kent ME17 3DQ  
Tel: 01622 843104 Fax: 01622 844220 E-mail: awcebd@mistral.co.uk  
<http://www.mistral.co.uk/awcebd/>

AWCEBD exists to promote excellence in services for children and young people who have EBD and to support those who work with them.

National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN)

4-5 Amber Business Village, Amber Close, Amington, TAMWORTH, Staffordshire B77 4RP  
Tel: 01827 311 500 Fax: 01827 313005 E-mail: welcome@nasen.org.uk  
<http://www.nasen.org.uk/>

NASEN is the major organisation representing professionals working in the field of special educational needs. It has a national network of active branches, including an IT Group, and runs conferences and seminars. NASEN produces three key periodicals: *Special!*, *British Journal of Special Education* and *Support for Learning*.

### **Internet sources**

There are many Internet sources which may be of help, and the URLs are cited alongside the organisation, publication or other source to which the site pertains. This section is limited to sources believed to be available only via the Internet, or foreign sites where access will be greatly eased by making use of the Internet.

### **General**

For brevity and ease of maintaining these sheets, the details of Internet sources central to the whole field of Special Needs are given on the 'Special Needs and ICT' sheet rather than repeating them on each specific sheet. Some of those general sources may also be able to provide you with assistance.

### **Bookshops**

<http://www.takethat.co.uk/links.htm>

Index page giving access to a wide range of bookshops including, for example, Amazon, Internet Bookshop (WH Smith) and Book PI@ce.

### **EBD Sites**

<http://www.stockportmbc.gov.uk/az/d.htm>

This Web site gives the results of a GEST project by Stockport LEA called Disruptive and Disaffected Pupils in Mainstream Schools, and gives practical advice and help for schools.

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British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta)  
Milburn Hill Road, Science Park, Coventry CV4 7JJ Tel: 024 7641 6994 Fax: 024 7641 1418  
Information Sheet E-mail: [infosheet@becta.org.uk](mailto:infosheet@becta.org.uk) E-mail: [Becta@becta.org.uk](mailto:Becta@becta.org.uk)  
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