

## Virtual Reference Adventure: Choose Your Own Experience

“They just don’t seem to be using the service as we would like them to...”

Does inappropriate patron behavior occur in a significant number of chat reference transactions? Or do occasional problem behaviors create staff perceptions about widespread misuse?

An evaluation of 1,369 chat reference transactions by AskColorado showed that:

- Heavy abuse of chat reference services by patrons is a myth and inappropriate behavior is actually decreasing (60% less in 2004 than in 2003).
- “Inappropriate” behavior is subjective.
- Communication difficulties may be overcome by managing patron expectations for the service.

For the complete report, see Sarah Napier and Jack Maness, [“Assessing Inappropriate Use of AskColorado.”](#)

Although accurate identification of patron age is not always possible, K-12 patrons are often assumed to be responsible for most problem behaviors (not unlike face-to-face encounters).

Here is some advice for dealing with difficult behaviors during chat reference transactions:

- AskColorado—[Advice on Working with Teens](#)
- Angela Pfeil, [Dealing with Teens...Virtually](#). (Presentation at the 2005 Collaborative Virtual Reference Symposium)
- Marie Radford and Joe Thompson, “Yo Dude! Y R U Typin So Slow? Interpersonal Communication in Chat Reference Transactions.” ([Handout](#) from the 2004 VRD Conference)
- Monecia Samuel, “When Kids Enter the Queue: Working with Unexpected Users on University Virtual Reference Sites.” ([Presentation](#) at the 2004 VRD Conference)

Maryland’s AskUsNow has a “Policy of Mutual Respect” on its welcome [page](#).

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Sponsored by the Statewide Virtual Reference Project, Washington State Library,  
a division of the Office of the Secretary of State.

Funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services through the Library Services and Technology Act.