“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)
- 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.