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## Parents tried to sell baby on eBay

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### Contents

The Article	2
Warm-ups	3
Before Reading / Listening	4
While Reading / Listening	5
Listening Gap Fill	6
After Reading / Listening	7
Student Survey	8
Discussion	9
Language Work	10
Writing	11
Homework	12
Answers	13

# THE ARTICLE

Police in Germany have arrested the parents of a seven-month-old baby boy after they tried to sell him on the Internet auction site eBay. The baby, named Merlin, is now in the care of the local government while police investigate his parents' actions. The couple said they offered their son for sale on eBay "as a joke". Unfortunately for them, the police failed to see the funny side and are now looking into whether the couple could be guilty of child trafficking. The infant's 23-year-old mother told Germany's Bild newspaper: "It was only a joke. I just wanted to see if someone would make an offer." The baby was advertised at a starting price of one euro (\$1.60) but no one placed any bids in the two hours the ad was online. German Internet users alerted the police, who tracked down the parents with the help of eBay officials.

The woman is currently undergoing tests on her fitness to be a mother. She said she posted her son online because he had become too noisy. The ad read: "Offering my nearly new baby for sale, as it has gotten too loud. It is a male baby, nearly 70cm long and can be used either in a baby carrier or a stroller." The title of the post was, "Baby - Pick up in Person Only". The mother has admitted her stunt was in very poor taste, telling the newspaper: "I would never give up my beloved Merlin." She fully understands the seriousness of her 'joke' and why people do not see it as a laughing matter. "They've taken my son and I've got to take some psychiatric tests next week," she said. Barbara Schmitt, a cybercrime expert, said: "I have seen the Internet used for all kinds of bad stuff, but trying to auction a baby has to be the most ridiculous."

# WARM-UPS

**1. BABIES:** Walk around the class and talk to other students about babies. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your partner(s) and share your findings.

**2. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

*police / auctions / eBay / investigations / jokes / child trafficking / starting price / fitness to be a mother / noisy / poor taste / psychiatric tests / cybercrime / bad stuff*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

**3. PARENTING:** Should parents have to go to parenting classes? With your partner(s), discuss the things below that parents should study in these parenting classes. Write your ideas in the table. Change partners and share your ideas. As a whole class, choose the best ideas and make a parenting course syllabus.

newborn safety	
language	
Internet	
manners	
TV and games	
money	

**4. FITNESS:** Is everyone fit to be a parent? Rank the items below on their importance to being a fit parent: 10 = "essential;" 1 = "not at all important". Compare your answers with your partner(s).

\_\_\_\_\_ money

\_\_\_\_\_ own home

\_\_\_\_\_ strong belief in religion

\_\_\_\_\_ non-smoking and non-drinking

\_\_\_\_\_ young

\_\_\_\_\_ speaks English well

\_\_\_\_\_ university educated

\_\_\_\_\_ excellent at sport

**5. HEADLINE PREDICTION:** With your partner(s), use the words in the "Chat" activity above to predict what the news article will be about. Once you have your story, change partners and share them. Who was closest to the real story?

**6. AUCTION:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'auction'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

# BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| a. A couple tried to sell their seven-month-old baby on eBay.           | T / F |
| b. When the police found out, they thought it was very funny.           | T / F |
| c. The parents put a starting price of \$1,000,000 for the baby.        | T / F |
| d. The baby's older brother told police about the eBay sale.            | T / F |
| e. The mother is having tests to see if she is good at sports.          | T / F |
| f. The mother said she tried to sell her baby because it was too noisy. | T / F |
| g. The mother has to undergo psychiatric testing in a week's time.      | T / F |
| h. An internet crime specialist thought the sale was ridiculous.        | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. tried        | a. presently     |
| 2. care         | b. trading       |
| 3. looking into | c. accepted      |
| 4. trafficking  | d. found         |
| 5. tracked down | e. investigating |
| 6. currently    | f. things        |
| 7. fitness      | g. attempted     |
| 8. admitted     | h. stupid        |
| 9. stuff        | i. safekeeping   |
| 10. ridiculous  | j. suitability   |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. the parents of a                    | a. taste                    |
| 2. in the care of                      | b. funny side               |
| 3. the police failed to see the        | c. of child trafficking     |
| 4. the couple could be guilty          | d. to be a mother           |
| 5. no one placed                       | e. the local government     |
| 6. undergoing tests on her fitness     | f. expert                   |
| 7. in very poor                        | g. the most ridiculous      |
| 8. people do not see it as a           | h. any bids                 |
| 9. a cybercrime                        | i. seven-month-old baby boy |
| 10. trying to auction a baby has to be | j. laughing matter          |

# WHILE READING / LISTENING

**GAP FILL:** Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Police in Germany have \_\_\_\_\_ the parents of a seven-month-old baby boy after they tried to sell him on the Internet auction \_\_\_\_\_ eBay. The baby, named Merlin, is now in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the local government while police investigate his parents' actions. The couple said they offered their son for sale on eBay "as a joke". Unfortunately for them, the police \_\_\_\_\_ to see the funny side and are now looking into whether the couple could be \_\_\_\_\_ of child trafficking. The infant's 23-year-old mother told Germany's Bild newspaper: "It was only a joke. I just wanted to see if someone would make an \_\_\_\_\_." The baby was advertised at a starting price of one euro (\$1.60) but no one \_\_\_\_\_ any bids in the two hours the ad was online. German Internet users alerted the police, who \_\_\_\_\_ down the parents with the help of eBay officials.

The woman is currently undergoing \_\_\_\_\_ on her \_\_\_\_\_ to be a mother. She said she \_\_\_\_\_ her son online because he had become too noisy. The ad read: "Offering my nearly new baby for sale, as it has gotten too loud. It is a male baby, nearly 70cm long and can be used either in a baby carrier or a stroller." The title of the \_\_\_\_\_ was, "Baby - Pick up in Person Only". The mother has admitted her stunt was in very poor \_\_\_\_\_, telling the newspaper: "I would never give up my beloved Merlin." She \_\_\_\_\_ understands the seriousness of her 'joke' and why people do not see it as a laughing matter. "They've taken my son and I've got to take some psychiatric tests next week," she said. Barbara Schmitt, a cybercrime expert, said: "I have seen the Internet used for all kinds of bad \_\_\_\_\_, but trying to auction a baby has to be the most \_\_\_\_\_."

*offer*  
*failed*  
*site*  
*placed*  
*care*  
*arrested*  
*tracked*  
*guilty*

*fully*  
*post*  
*fitness*  
*stuff*  
*taste*  
*tests*  
*ridiculous*  
*posted*

## **LISTENING:** Listen and fill in the spaces.

Police in Germany \_\_\_\_\_ parents of a seven-month-old baby boy after they tried to sell \_\_\_\_\_ Internet auction site eBay. The baby, named Merlin, is \_\_\_\_\_ the local government while police investigate his parents' actions. The couple \_\_\_\_\_ their son for sale on eBay "as a joke". Unfortunately for them, the police \_\_\_\_\_ funny side and are now looking into whether the couple could be guilty of child trafficking. The infant's 23-year-old mother told Germany's Bild newspaper: "\_\_\_\_\_. I just wanted to see if someone would make an offer." The baby was advertised \_\_\_\_\_ one euro (\$1.60) but no one placed any bids in the two hours the ad was online. German Internet users alerted the police, \_\_\_\_\_ parents with the help of eBay officials.

The woman is currently undergoing tests on her \_\_\_\_\_ mother. She said she posted her son online because he had become too noisy. The ad read: "Offering \_\_\_\_\_ sale, as it has gotten too loud. It is a male baby, nearly 70cm long \_\_\_\_\_ in a baby carrier or a stroller." The title of the post was, "Baby - Pick up in Person Only". The \_\_\_\_\_ her stunt was in very poor taste, telling the newspaper: "I would never give up my beloved Merlin." She fully understands \_\_\_\_\_ her 'joke' and why people do not see it as a laughing matter. "They've taken my son \_\_\_\_\_ take some psychiatric tests next week," she said. Barbara Schmitt, a cybercrime expert, said: "I have seen the Internet used for \_\_\_\_\_, but trying to auction a baby has to be the \_\_\_\_\_."

## AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**poor**' and '**taste**'.

<b>poor</b>	<b>taste</b>
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- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• tried</li><li>• care</li><li>• side</li><li>• guilty</li><li>• bid</li><li>• down</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• fitness</li><li>• nearly</li><li>• either</li><li>• taste</li><li>• laughing</li><li>• most</li></ul>
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# STUDENT GOOD PARENTING SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about good parenting in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.



# PARENTS & BABY DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the term 'auction'?
- c) What are your thoughts on this story?
- d) Should the parents be sent to prison for trying to sell their son?
- e) What do you think of the parents' claim that they put their son on eBay as a joke?
- f) Do you think eBay should check its ads more carefully?
- g) Do you think the parents should be tried for child trafficking?
- h) How do you think Merlin will feel when he finds out he was once an item for sale on eBay?
- i) What do you think would have happened if someone had placed a bid?
- j) Should parents have to attend parenting classes?

*Parents tried to sell baby on eBay - 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2008*  
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# PARENTS & BABY DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) What adjectives would you use to describe what you read?
- c) Do you think the woman is fit to be a mother?
- d) What would you do if you saw a baby for sale on the Internet?
- e) What's the best way to calm a baby who cries a lot?
- f) Would you be (Are you) a good parent?
- g) What kind of psychiatric tests should the woman have?
- h) What other bad stuff is there on the Internet?
- i) What questions would you like to ask the mother?
- j) Did you like this discussion?

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# LANGUAGE

Police in Germany have arrested the parents of a seven-month-old baby boy they tried to (1) \_\_\_\_ him on the Internet auction site eBay. The baby, named Merlin, is now in the (2) \_\_\_\_ of the local government while police investigate his parents' actions. The couple said they offered their son (3) \_\_\_\_ sale on eBay "as a joke". Unfortunately for them, the police failed to see the funny side and are now looking (4) \_\_\_\_ whether the couple could be guilty of child trafficking. The infant's 23-year-old mother told Germany's Bild newspaper: "It was only a joke. I just wanted to see (5) \_\_\_\_ someone would make an offer." The baby was advertised at a starting price of one euro (\$1.60) but no one placed any (6) \_\_\_\_ in the two hours the ad was online. German Internet users alerted the police, who tracked down the parents with the help of eBay officials.

The woman is currently undergoing tests (7) \_\_\_\_ her fitness to be a mother. She said she posted her son online because he had become too noisy. The ad read: "Offering my nearly new baby for sale, as it has gotten too (8) \_\_\_\_\_. It is a male baby, nearly 70cm long and can be used either in a baby carrier or a stroller." The title of the post was, "Baby - Pick up in (9) \_\_\_\_ Only". The mother has admitted her stunt was in very poor taste, telling the newspaper: "I would never give up my beloved Merlin." She (10) \_\_\_\_ understands the seriousness of her 'joke' and why people do not see it as a (11) \_\_\_\_ matter. "They've taken my son and I've got to take some psychiatric tests next week," she said. Barbara Schmitt, a cybercrime expert, said: "I have seen the Internet used for all kinds of bad (12) \_\_\_\_\_, but trying to auction a baby has to be the most ridiculous."

**Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.**

- |     |              |            |              |             |
|-----|--------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1.  | (a) sells    | (b) sold   | (c) sale     | (d) sell    |
| 2.  | (a) carry    | (b) caring | (c) care     | (d) cared   |
| 3.  | (a) on       | (b) for    | (c) to       | (d) by      |
| 4.  | (a) into     | (b) onto   | (c) unto     | (d) to      |
| 5.  | (a) as       | (b) which  | (c) if       | (d) while   |
| 6.  | (a) bits     | (b) bins   | (c) bibs     | (d) bids    |
| 7.  | (a) in       | (b) on     | (c) by       | (d) as      |
| 8.  | (a) loud     | (b) loudly | (c) loudness | (d) louder  |
| 9.  | (a) Mother   | (b) Person | (c) People   | (d) Parent  |
| 10. | (a) full     | (b) empty  | (c) fully    | (d) fullest |
| 11. | (a) laughing | (b) laugh  | (c) laughter | (d) laughs  |
| 12. | (a) staffs   | (b) stiff  | (c) staff    | (d) stuff   |

## WRITING:

Write about *parenting* for 10 minutes. Correct your partner's paper.

[illegible]

# HOMEWORK

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find out more about this story. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

**3. PARENTING:** Make a poster about parenting. Include tips on all the different stages in a child's life. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

**4. YOU DID WHAT?:** Write a magazine article about what happened when Merlin found out his parents put him on eBay. Include imaginary interviews with the 16-year-old Merlin and his parents.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

**5. LETTER:** Write a letter to Merlin's mother. Ask her three questions about her "joke". Give her three pieces of advice on what she should tell her son about putting him on eBay. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

**6. DIARY / JOURNAL:** You are the psychologist testing Merlin's mother. Write your diary entry about one day in your work. Include your thoughts on her fitness to be a mother. Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson.

# ANSWERS

## TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T      b. F      c. F      d. F      e. F      f. T      g. T      h. T

## SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                      |                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1.      tried        | a.      attempted     |
| 2.      care         | b.      safekeeping   |
| 3.      looking into | c.      investigating |
| 4.      trafficking  | d.      trading       |
| 5.      tracked down | e.      found         |
| 6.      currently    | f.      presently     |
| 7.      fitness      | g.      suitability   |
| 8.      admitted     | h.      accepted      |
| 9.      stuff        | i.      things        |
| 10.      ridiculous  | j.      stupid        |

## PHRASE MATCH:

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1.      the parents of a                    | a.      seven-month-old baby boy |
| 2.      in the care of                      | b.      the local government     |
| 3.      the police failed to see the        | c.      funny side               |
| 4.      the couple could be guilty          | d.      of child trafficking     |
| 5.      no one placed                       | e.      any bids                 |
| 6.      undergoing tests on her fitness     | f.      to be a mother           |
| 7.      in very poor                        | g.      taste                    |
| 8.      people do not see it as a           | h.      laughing matter          |
| 9.      a cybercrime                        | i.      expert                   |
| 10.      trying to auction a baby has to be | j.      the most ridiculous      |

## GAP FILL:

### Parents tried to sell baby on eBay

Police in Germany have **arrested** the parents of a seven-month-old baby boy after they tried to sell him on the Internet auction **site** eBay. The baby, named Merlin, is now in the **care** of the local government while police investigate his parents' actions. The couple said they offered their son for sale on eBay "as a joke". Unfortunately for them, the police **failed** to see the funny side and are now looking into whether the couple could be **guilty** of child trafficking. The infant's 23-year-old mother told Germany's Bild newspaper: "It was only a joke. I just wanted to see if someone would make an **offer**." The baby was advertised at a starting price of one euro (\$1.60) but no one **placed** any bids in the two hours the ad was online. German Internet users alerted the police, who **tracked** down the parents with the help of eBay officials.

The woman is currently undergoing **tests** on her **fitness** to be a mother. She said she **posted** her son online because he had become too noisy. The ad read: "Offering my nearly new baby for sale, as it has gotten too loud. It is a male baby, nearly 70cm long and can be used either in a baby carrier or a stroller." The title of the **post** was, "Baby - Pick up in Person Only". The mother has admitted her stunt was in very poor **taste**, telling the newspaper: "I would never give up my beloved Merlin." She **fully** understands the seriousness of her 'joke' and why people do not see it as a laughing matter. "They've taken my son and I've got to take some psychiatric tests next week," she said. Barbara Schmitt, a cybercrime expert, said: "I have seen the Internet used for all kinds of bad **stuff**, but trying to auction a baby has to be the most **ridiculous**."

## LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - d      2 - c      3 - b      4 - a      5 - c      6 - d      7 - b      8 - a      9 - b      10 - c      11 - a      12 - d