

Youth in Care and Social Media Use

Best Practices for Youth



We know that being on social media is important for you. In fact, there can be many benefits to being on social media. However, there are also risks. Below are important guidelines to keep you safe.

Keep profiles private

The default setting for some social media sites are already set to friends only. However other sites (Facebook and Instagram) are automatically set to public. Learn how to adjust your privacy settings for each site.

- See the Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat links in the related resources section for help.

Only talk to people you know

This includes not accepting friend requests or follow requests from people you do not know personally, even if they claim to be a friend of a friend. You never know who someone really is online. It is very easy for an adult who is not safe to be around to pretend to be younger online.

Be careful of what you write

It is easy to say things we do not mean online, talking to someone online is different than talking to them in person. It may be easier to tell someone things about yourself online since they are not right in front of you.

It can also be easier to say mean or hurtful things online where we cannot see how our words may affect people. A good rule to follow: if you wouldn't say it in person you should not say it online.

Biological families

If you are not allowed to be in contact with certain family members it is important to understand why and what might happen if you are.

- Use a fake name or abbreviations instead of putting first and last names online.

- If someone does contact you, be sure to let your social worker or caregiver know.

Do not share your location

Some apps, like the Snapchat map or Facebook post locations, tracks users locations for friends or anyone else to see. It is important to make sure these features are turned off.

Do not allow photo tags

Some sites allow users to 'tag' or link an image to the people in the photo. This is a very easy way for you to be found.

The internet is forever

Once something is posted online, even if you think you have deleted it, it can still be found. You never know who saw it or saved a copy while it was up.

- Apps, such as Snapchat, have "self-destructing" features where the picture or text will disappear after a few seconds. Don't be fooled, once an image is gone it is not gone forever. There are apps that can take and store photos without the sender knowing.
- Youth should be aware that in some states, sending or being in possession of "nudes" of underage youth (either themselves or others) is considered creating or distributing child pornography and can be punishable by law.

General safety tips

- Never agree to meet someone in person you have met online.
- Stay away from chat rooms or discussion groups that look sketchy. Trust your instincts, if it seems risky or makes you feel uncomfortable, stay away.
- Log off, close a browser window, or navigate away if something online doesn't seem right or makes you feel uncomfortable.

- Be wary of people who start asking too many questions about your personal life or want personal information.
- Never give out passwords, even to friends.
- If someone is bothering you or making you feel uncomfortable block them and report their profile or username to that platform.

Summary

When social media is used safely the benefits you experience can be greater than the risks. Talk to a caregiver or social worker if something happens online that makes you feel uncomfortable or upset. Don't be afraid to ask questions and discuss social media at home. You may know more about apps, trends, and social media than your social worker and caregivers—be their teacher, they want to learn from you and be able to support you.

References and Resources

- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2017). Social media: Tips for youth in foster care. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/smtips_youth.pdf
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Suggested citation: LeBouef, Samantha & Dworkin, Jodi (2019). Youth in Care and Social Media Use: A Few Things to Remember... Available at: z.umn.edu/Youth-and-SocialMedia

Funding for this project: *The Youth in Care & Social Media project* is published by the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW), School of Social Work, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. This project was supported, in part, by grant #GRK129722 from Minnesota Department of Human Service, Children and Family Services Division. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Center, School, College, University or their funding source.