

INTERNET POLICY

Keeping Children Safe on the Internet

-Advice for Foster Carers



1. Introduction

Foster Care Link believes that the Internet is a valuable resource for learning, developing interests and a good source of information that helps children with homework and hobbies. We are aware however that children use it for other purposes, for example:

- ❖ Playing interactive games
- ❖ Emailing
- ❖ Instant messaging
- ❖ Chat rooms
- ❖ Social networking (twitter, facebook, etc)

We also recognise that not all internet use is positive and can be used for cyber-bullying, downloading inappropriate material and for grooming. Many children will be aware of these uses of the internet, but are often naive about the real risks. Children are increasingly computer literate and in many cases may know more than their carers about Computers and the Internet. This can be a positive which a carer can use to learn from the child, to explore what he/or she enjoys most from the Internet, which websites are the most interesting, get to know what's good and what's not so good about the child's Internet experience. Older children/teenagers are however likely to be more secretive about their internet use and will view adult involvement as interfering.

You are however the responsible adult and you must not let the child's knowledge deter you from exercising authority and providing guidance.

2. Understanding Internet Safety

With the rapid development of the internet and mobile devices with internet access, both social workers and foster carers have to understand it is almost impossible to completely control a child's access to the internet. Whilst it may be possible to exercise some control within your own home, mobile phones and laptops provide the possibility of complete access to the internet. Even if you install parental controls, your foster child's friends may have no restrictions on their phones and laptops.

The starting point for

Questions to consider are:

- Where is your computer located?
- Can you routinely supervise its use?
- Do you have more than one computer?
- Does your foster child have their own laptop or one supplied by the local authority?
- Do you know how many hours each day your foster child spends on the computer?
- Does your computer have parental control software installed?
- Do you know which websites your foster child accesses?
- Do they use Chatrooms/Social Networking sites?
- Is there a web cam connected to the computer?
- Does the child's tablet computer or mobile phone have an inbuilt camera?
- Does your foster child have access to a digital camera or camcorder?
- Does your foster child have a mobile phone with Internet access?
- Does your foster child have a games console with Internet access?

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Do you know if your foster child has access to the internet outside of your home?

There are no hard and fast rules about how much time a child should spend on the computer. Children's use of the Internet varies from week to week, depending on the kind of homework they are doing or their particular interests and hobbies. Carers should be aware that prolonged continuous periods of computer use, may harm a child's eyesight. Carers need to make sure:

- The children are not neglecting their homework.
- That the time spent on the computer does not effect their social and outdoor activities.
- That they monitor the use of the Internet to ensure that the children are doing their home work and not just playing games.

Although young people need some privacy, carers need to:

- ✓ Make sure they are familiar with the how the young person is using the Internet, and how long they usually spend online;
- ✓ Ask which websites they visit, in particular social networking sites;
- ✓ Give appropriate advice and guidance on the potential dangers of the Internet.
- ✓ Be aware of bullying that can occur using the internet through social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter.
- ✓ Be aware of changes of behaviour, particularly following periods of internet access. This could be possible indicators of grooming or cyber bullying.

See also FCL Policy on Child Exploration and Child Sexual Exploitation.

Practical ways a carer can do to protect a child /young person in their care?

- Install parental control software.
- Always make sure that if chat rooms are accessed, they are either child oriented chat rooms, or Moderated (supervised), either with an adult present in the room or some other technical way i.e. ask Internet providers or website administrators about what controls there are.
- Make sure that the chat rooms have block message option.

Give the child young person guidance and supervision

- **Never to give any personal details away.**
- **Never send photographs of yourself.**
- **Every one you meet on the Internet is a stranger; therefore never arrange to meet anyone you have met on the net.**
- **Keep your online 'friends' online only.**

Always remember to

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1. **Talk to your foster child** about their Internet use and take an interest. Your involvement is the best way of keeping them safe. Encourage them to talk to you about any concerns they may have.
2. Pass on the **safety advice** i.e. keeping personal information personal.
3. **Be positive!** The Internet is a fantastic resource for learning, entertainment and communication. Just like in the real world however, you need to take a few **sensible precautions to stay safe.**
4. Let your foster child know **they can come to you** if something they don't like happens online.
5. **Try not to overreact!** This could simply make your foster child secretive about their Internet use and close down lines of communication between you.
6. Remember that all the safety advice here also applies to **going online via a mobile phone.**
7. Advise your foster child not to tell their online "friends" that they are in foster care and if questioned just to say they are staying with 'Auntie and Uncle'.

If you decide to use software to filter or **monitor information** from the Internet, talk this over with your foster child. Any **ground rules** you agree will be much more effective.

Your own use of the Internet.

It is important that as carers you are also aware of the impact of your own use of the internet and that of other members of your family.

- If you have more than one computer in your home, how do you ensure that these are not used inappropriately?
- Do you use social networking sites? If so what information about yourself and your family do you place in your profile/account and who has access to this?

It is essential that you do not place any information about current or previous foster children on any social networking site, even if you have limited who can have access to your account. Equally you should not post any family photographs on any sites, where a foster child is included in the photograph, nor individual photographs of foster children.

Some social networking sites can be used to trace people. From time to time local authorities have to take a decision to remove a child from its family and not to inform parents or other relatives of the child's whereabouts in order to properly safeguard the child. Parents can and will attempt to trace the child and will use the Internet to do so. If you have a child placed with you where there is a very clear need to protect that child's whereabouts, you should therefore not include any information on a social networking site that indicates that you are a foster carer.

Foster carers should not use social networking sites to "befriend" and find out information about the child's activities and use of the internet.

Foster Care Link's Training Portal includes a comprehensive online course on Internet Safety Awareness. We request that all carers complete this course.

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For further help you can contact any of the organisations listed below:

www.kidsmart.org.uk

www.nch.org.uk

www.parentscentre.gov.uk

www.besafeonline.org

www.childnet-int.org