

Social Media: Conversations with Youth in Foster Care

A guide for foster parents and relative caregivers

The Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare recognizes that many youth in state custody utilize a variety of social media means for regular, every day communication with peers, family and the world. Unlike other forms of communication, social media use can become public and permanent.

As a foster parent or relative caregiver, it is important to understand how to help guide youth on the protection of their (and your) information online.

What is social media?

Social media includes various online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily via the internet to share information and resources. Commonly used social media tools (such as Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and many others) as well as various mobile applications are important outreach and communication tools. These tools can encompass audio, video, images, podcasts and other multimedia communications.

What is my role as a foster parent or relative caregiver?

As a caregiver, it is important to become familiar with the various social media vehicles (what they are, how are they used) and promote healthy skills for online privacy. Given this digital age, the development of proper and safe information technology is imperative for youth to understand.

The goal is to raise youth to be empowered to make safe choices online as they enter adulthood.

Where do I find out more information about social media?

DHS Child Welfare offers a caregiver training, Parenting in the Digital Age. Speak with your certifier if you are interested in participating in this training.

[Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) also offers a page specific to [social media](#) with helpful articles.

Tips for safe social media use

- 1. Talk with the youth's caseworker.** Ask about any safety needs or concerns that may impact the youth's use of social media.
- 2. Discuss social media with the youth in your care.** Ask the youth which social media tools they use and how often they use them.
- 3. Have open discussions about monitoring social media use.** Balance monitoring with privacy — make opportunities for regular conversations about their online activities.
- 4. Settle on house rules early on in the placement.** When rules around internet usage are set up front, it makes the conversation easier to discuss what is acceptable.
- 5. Teach youth to keep personal information private.** Help youth to understand that posting their full name, address, phone number, school information and other identifying information puts them at risk for inappropriate contact, cyberbullying or child predators. Explain the need to be careful. Make sure youth understand that not everyone is who they say they are.
- 6. Discuss cyberbullying.** Help youth understand not to send, forward, or respond to mean or embarrassing messages or pictures. Contact the local school for information on cyberbullying or see stopbullying.gov.
- 7. Mistakes happen.** When youth make a mistake, work alongside the youth on what to do next.