



Social Media: Tips for Youth in Foster Care

If you're a youth in foster care, you probably know social media can help you stay in touch with friends and express yourself. But did you know it can also put you at risk? This tip sheet can help you use social media safely.

Using Social Media: The Good

- **Social ties and family connections.** Keep in touch with friends and siblings and meet new people.
- **Support.** Connect with peers who have similar life experiences through online community groups. (See FosterClub at <https://www.fosterclub.com/forums/youth-message-board> and Foster Care Alumni of America's groups on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/FCAANational/>.)
- **Self-expression.** Use photos, videos, blogs, and other digital venues to express your feelings and ideas.

Be in touch. Social media can connect you with other young people who understand what you're going through. Check out FosterClub at <http://fosterclub.com>.

Using Social Media: The Bad

- **Privacy concerns.** Avoid sharing too much personal information—you never know how others might use it.
- **Cyberbullying.** Don't respond to mean comments. Use privacy settings to block bullies, instead. If the harassment continues, tell a trusted adult. (Learn more at <http://backgroundchecks.org/cyber-bullying-helping-the-bullied-stopping-the-bullies.html>.)
- **Breaking rules.** Don't engage with family members or others who are not supposed to contact you.
- **Inappropriate communication.** Watch out for adults who are looking for inappropriate, and sometimes sexual, relationships. Private messaging with people you don't know or chatting on dating apps are often dangerous. Discuss this with a trusted adult.

Be informed. Read some upsides and downsides to social networking at <http://foster-care-newsletter.com/foster-teens-and-social-media/#.WlJfLsGQxPZ>.



Staying Safe on Social Media

Use common sense and follow the rules set by your caseworker and foster parent. If you receive (or send) communications that are hurtful or make you feel uncomfortable, tell an adult.

- **Set strong privacy settings.** Limit who can see your posts. Remember, others can copy and share your posts with whoever they want; nothing online is truly private. (See how to manage your settings at <https://identity.utexas.edu/everyone/how-to-manage-your-social-media-privacy-settings>.)
- **Don't post information that reveals your location.** Some apps provide GPS information without you knowing about it. Manage location services for your smartphone or turn them off completely. (Learn how to manage location services at <http://download.cnet.com/blog/download-blog/location-services-101/>)
- **Don't give out personal information.** This includes your full name, address, phone number, school name, or password. Never send revealing photos (sexting). Don't even share your password with friends.
- **Be safe playing online games.** Gaming online can expose you to risks. Never reveal your full name or other identifying information. If another player makes you uncomfortable, tell an adult and report and/or block others by searching "Block online player" and entering either the platform or the name of the game's maker. (Learn more about gaming safety at <http://www.atg.wa.gov/gaming-tips-kids-tweens-and-teens>.)
- **Be kind and show respect for others.** While you may feel bold at the keyboard, don't say or do anything you wouldn't say or do face to face. Taking a screen shot of a private conversation or photo and passing it around is nothing to be proud of.
- **Avoid meeting anyone in person that you've "met" online.** If you feel that you must meet an online contact, discuss this idea with your foster parent or another trusted adult. If you decide to meet, choose a public place and don't go alone. (Learn more from <http://www.teensontrafficking.org/index.php?ID=8>.)

Think Before You Post!

You can't control what happens to a comment or photo once you've sent it. Before you post, ask yourself the following questions:

- How would I feel if the person who was supposed to see this {message, video, photo} shares it?
- How would I feel if my parent, teacher, or caseworker saw this?
- Could this be offensive to others or hurt my chances of getting into college or getting a job? (Yes, college recruiters and employers look at social media pages!)

Remember, once it's out there, it's impossible to take it back!

Be Responsible. Learn more about using social media responsibly in this video, "Five Social Media Musts for Teens," which is available at <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/videos/5-social-media-musts-for-teens#>

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