

Social Media and Internet Safety

STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

- [Regulation 11 - Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare.](#)
- [Regulation 12 - Arrangements for the protection of children.](#)
- [Regulation 14 - Duty to promote contact.](#)
- [Regulation 16 - Education, employment and leisure activities.](#)

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards:

- [Standard 4 - Safeguarding children.](#)

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

- [Standard 4 – Know how to communicate effectively.](#)
- [Standard 6 – Keep children and young people safe from harm.](#)

RELATED GUIDANCE

- [Think U Know](#) - Online safety information.
- [Childnet](#) - latest information on the sites and services that children and young people use, plus information about mobiles, gaming, downloading, social networking and much more.
- [Child Safety Online](#)
- [NSPCC - Parental Controls](#)
- [NSPCC Report Remove Tool](#) - The tool enables young people under the age of 18 to report a nude image or video of themselves which has appeared online. The Internet Watch Foundation will review these reports and work to remove any content which breaks the law.
- [UK Council for Internet Safety \(UKCIS\) Digital Passport](#) - a communication tool to support children and young people with care experience to talk with their carers about their online lives.
- [Talking to Your Child About Online Sexual Harassment \(Children's Commissioner\)](#)
- [The Dark Web Explained \(for Parents and Carers\)](#)
- [Online Safety SEND Resources](#)
- [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership \(in Reading\) Online Safety Procedure](#)

Introduction:

The internet has a significant influence on children and young people, directly and indirectly impacting almost every aspect of their lives. This influence is mostly positive, as it provides an essential tool for learning, building relationships, and helping them find their place in the world.

However, there are instances when the online experience can be less positive. As a foster carer, it's crucial to protect children from the dark side of the web. With social media, apps, and the web readily accessible, it's becoming increasingly challenging to oversee and enforce internet usage rules. The dangers are no longer limited to the family PC, making it harder to supervise and monitor online activities.

To ensure the safety of children in your care, it is essential to understand the risks they face online and be vigilant in protecting them. In this guide to internet safety for foster carers, we will cover various topics, including the risks children encounter online and the steps you can take to ensure the internet continues to have a positive influence on them.

Understanding the Risks and What to Look Out For:

Online Grooming:

One of the most disturbing aspects of the internet is online grooming, where adults adopt friendly personas to befriend children online or through social media. They gain the child's trust and may persuade them to share personal information, explicit images, or even attempt to arrange a face-to-face meeting. Online grooming is sadly effective due to the anonymity of the web, and children may trust virtual "friends" more quickly than those they meet in the real world. Active supervision is crucial.

Cyberbullying:

Cyberbullying has become a significant risk for young people online, with serious implications for their health and well-being. It often starts with a joke but can escalate into a targeted campaign of abuse, threats, and inappropriate images across multiple social media platforms. Cyberbullying can stem from a child's peer group or come from anonymous internet trolls. Early monitoring and intervention are essential to prevent further harm, even if you suspect a child in your care may be a perpetrator of cyberbullying.

Over-sharing and Sexting:

Children and young adults are often unaware of the risks of sharing personal information or sexually explicit content online, known as sexting. What begins as a message or image to a peer can quickly escalate, leading to cyberbullying, exploitation, or abuse. It's crucial to educate children about the dangers of oversharing on social media, even within their friendship group, and discourage them from sharing or producing sexually explicit images, which can be criminal.

Smartphone Apps and Gaming:

Smartphone apps and gaming have become popular among children and young adults. While most are safe, some carry age restrictions or are unsuitable for youngsters and should be avoided. Online criminals can exploit certain apps to contact vulnerable children or access their personal information and data, including their location. Screening the apps, a child downloads to their device is crucial to ensuring their safety and privacy.

Specific Online Risks for Children Looked After:

Children in care may face additional risks when accessing the internet privately on smartphones or tablets. As a foster carer, you must be aware of these risks and actively supervise their online interactions. Children Looked After may be vulnerable to unregulated contact from birth parents or relatives, bullying, and security issues. It is essential to set an example of online security, check privacy settings, and equip yourself with the knowledge to safeguard their online interactions. BfFC's IFA offers training to foster carers around online safety.

Other Risks Online:

In addition to the risks mentioned above, there are other dangers that can jeopardize a child's online safety. These include content promoting harmful behaviours, sharing personal information with strangers, and exposure to violent or explicit material. It is crucial to maintain open lines of communication, monitor their internet usage and identify any changes in behaviour, i.e. they are more aggressive or withdrawn, to address these risks proactively.

Protective Measures and Promoting Internet Safety:

- **Communication and Involvement:** Maintaining open and honest communication with the child in your care is key to ensuring their online safety. Encourage them to share their online experiences and concerns with you, so you can better understand their behaviours and address any issues that arise. By involving yourself in their online activities, you can guide them towards responsible and safe online behaviour.
- **Privacy and Security Controls:** Help the child set up privacy and security controls on their devices and social media accounts. Adjust privacy settings, limit access to personal information, and enable parental controls on devices and apps. Teach them how to report offensive content and block users to maintain a safer online environment.
- **Monitoring Internet Usage:** Regularly monitor the child's internet usage, particularly regarding social media and online interactions. Set appropriate boundaries and time limits for internet use. Check their browsing history and online friends to ensure their safety. Be transparent about your monitoring practices to build trust.
- **Educating About Online Risks:** Educate the child about the potential dangers they may encounter online, such as online grooming, cyberbullying, and the risks associated with over-sharing or sexting. Help them understand the importance of

responsible online behaviour and the potential consequences of their actions. Encourage them to think critically and question the reliability of online information.

- **Staying Informed:** Stay up to date with the latest trends, apps, and platforms popular among young people. This will help you understand the potential risks and challenges they may encounter online. Regularly review and update your knowledge about internet safety by consulting reputable resources and organizations dedicated to online safety, such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP), or government websites that provide guidance on internet safety.
- **Fostering a Positive Online Environment:** Encourage the child to engage in positive online activities, such as educational resources, creative outlets, and productive online communities. Promote critical thinking skills and help them develop a healthy scepticism towards online information. Encourage them to be respectful and kind when interacting with others online.

10 top tips for how to keep children safe online:

1. consider using internet filtering software and child-friendly search engines. Use your browser's controls, as some offer differing degrees of security for each family member. Make sure you have effective and updated anti-virus/anti-spyware software and firewall running before you go online
2. check out what child protection services your Internet Service Provider (ISP) offers - do they filter for spam, for instance? If not, ask them why
3. keep the computer in a communal area of the house, where it's easier to monitor what your children are viewing
4. tell children not to give out their personal details. If they want to subscribe to any services online, make up a family email address to receive the mail.
5. children love to chat, but make sure they only use moderated chat rooms and encourage them to introduce you to their online friends. Learn how to use sites properly. Use the privacy features to restrict strangers' access to their profile. Encourage them to keep their profile 'closed,' so only 'friends' are able to view it
6. encourage the children to tell you if they feel uncomfortable, upset or threatened by anything they see online
7. involve the children in writing your own family code of acceptable internet use. Remember that what's acceptable for a teenager isn't necessarily okay for a primary school-aged child, so get their input
8. does the child have a mobile phone? If so, do you know if they can access the internet through it and what applications they may have downloaded and be using?
9. remember what goes online stays online. Warn the children not to write anything or publish pictures that might later cause embarrassment or problems. Never post comments that are abusive or may cause offence to either individuals or groups of society, as this can now be classed as a criminal offence
10. surf together. Go online with your children and become part of their online life. The key to safe surfing is communication.

Promoting internet safety is an ongoing process. Stay engaged, adapt to new technologies, and maintain open lines of communication with the child in your care. By being proactive and informed, you can help create a safe and positive online experience for them.