

The Changing Face of Connections

So much has – and continues to – change about the way we connect with friends and family members. What used to be shared over phone calls, during in-person visits, or by letter is now posted on Facebook, revealed over Skype or Face Time, and sent via email. Social media has become commonplace for all of us, children and adults.

Furthermore, the world of social media changes every day. It seems as though upgrades, updates, new platforms, and other changes happen just as soon as we've mastered a particular site or platform. It's no wonder that many foster parents find themselves confused and overwhelmed. From deciding which sites you could sign up for, to monitoring social media and Internet usage for the children in your care, there is a lot to learn. In this issue of *Fostering Across Wisconsin*, we will give you an overview of today's most active social media sites, as well as



tips on keeping yourself and children safe.

Inside you'll find a primer on some of today's most popular social media channels and the type of information typically shared on each. We'll also address some of the benefits of connecting and staying connected with social media, as well as share some potential hazards to be aware of.

And, as always, we'll share some resources for you to continue learning if you choose to do so.

It can be easy to feel lost when it comes to keeping up with today's technologies. We hope this issue of *Fostering Across Wisconsin* can

introduce you to or update you about emerging trends and also ease some fears and anxieties about how the children in your care are navigating the Internet and the world around them.

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An Introduction to Social Media

Here are some of the most popular social media platforms explained using some sample posts/updates that may reflect a foster parent's experiences:

Twitter – I am a #foster parent. Twitter uses 140 character “tweets” which tell the world news, information, or how you are doing. Using “hashtags” (#) in your tweet becomes part of a larger searchable conversation, making it easier to connect with others who share your interests.

Facebook – I like being a foster parent. Facebook is probably the most well-known social media platform and has been falling in popularity with teens because of it. (Once they found out how many moms and dads were joining Facebook, teens started leaving and heading to other social networking sites!) On Facebook, people share “status updates,” which may or may not include pictures and links to tell the world what they are up to. Facebook has just recently started integrating hashtags (#), but has been less successful with making them stick.

YouTube – Why I love being a foster parent. YouTube is a video sharing platform. Users can upload a video and also include keywords in the video's description that will allow them to be searched by topic. Users can also comment, like, or dislike videos. In recent years, YouTube has become increasingly strict about the type of content that users are allowed to share.

LinkedIn – My skills include being a loving foster parent. LinkedIn is a social network platform for professionals. You can upload your resume and connect with current and former employers and coworkers. Think of it as professional networking's version of Facebook.

Snap Chat – Here is a picture you can only see for 20 seconds of my new foster parent training certificate. Snap Chat is a new way to

share pictures. Rather than having your photos immortalized on Facebook for all your relatives to see, Snap Chat allows users to share pictures which “self-destruct” after 20 seconds of viewing.

Pinterest – The kids in my care and I do these fun crafts together. Pinterest serves as a digital picture reference for a wide variety of subjects. Users can group and save content (recipes, hair styles, craft projects, etc.) by “pinning” it on “boards” to view later.

Instagram – Look what the kids in my care made at school today! Instagram is a picture sharing site best known for the wide variety of filters users can put on pictures to manipulate how they look. Users post pictures using a description which sometime includes “hashtags” (#).

Foursquare – This is where I pick up the supplies for all of the crafts we do together. Foursquare allows users to “check-in” to businesses, homes, schools, and any other locations for which a user has created a check-in spot. Some businesses offer deals or discounts for “check-ins.” Participating businesses generally display the foursquare logo somewhere prominent for customers and clients to see.

Vine – Here is a six second video on how to become a foster parent. Vine is a video sharing platform that allows users to shoot multiple segments and then create one six second video. Many vines are funny or clever, but companies are moving into using them for advertising as well.

Tumblr – What I love about being a foster parent. Tumblr is a blog-like site that allows users to share their thoughts mainly through pictures. Users can “follow” each other and get notified when new content is created. If you have thought about blogging, but only have small snippets of time, Tumblr might be the better platform for you.



Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center (FCARC)
Info@wifostercareandadoption.org
800-947-8074
6682 W. Greenfield Ave., Suite 310
Milwaukee, WI 53214
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Social Media Safety

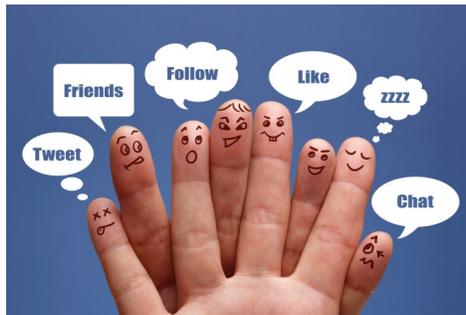
After getting to know the basics and what platforms are out there, it can be helpful to think about the benefits of being involved with social media. You also may find these tips on keeping yourself, and the youth in your care, safe while interacting online.

Benefits

Staying connected. Many foster parents report platforms like Facebook and Twitter have helped them connect with other foster parents. This connection can bring support, resources, and even child care. For youth in care, social media can be a safe and appropriate way to stay connected with birth family members or siblings who are placed in other homes. If the youth has had to change schools, social media can also be a great way for them to stay in touch with friends.

Self-expression. Videos, pictures, and blogs can help foster parents express their feelings and ideas with the greater fostering community. Maybe you had success with a behavior modification tool or made a fun craft; why not share it with others? Youth in care have also reported that sharing their feelings and thoughts in these ways has helped them shape their identity and heal from past hurts.

Keeping memories. Social media can be a form of digital journaling. (Keep in mind the safety guidelines below.) Foster parents can, using confidentiality settings and safeguards, share their stories of triumph and their struggles to help themselves, as well as others. Youth in care can do the same. Using the correct privacy settings and monitoring, youth can digitally track their story so that they can “take it” with them anywhere.



Staying Safe

Talk. When youth come into your care, ask them if they are involved on any social media sites. We suggest using this as an opportunity to ask what the expectations were in previous homes or placements. Then, be open and honest about the expectations when using social media or the Internet in your home.

It can be helpful to set ground rules for use early and make sure they are age/safety appropriate. Consider having those include access to passwords and being connected. Be mindful of any court ordered no contact rulings; those are also being followed on social media. Explain the need for safety and any consequences of not following the family’s ground rules.

Privacy. Many foster parents have found success in working with the youth in their care on adjusting the privacy settings on various accounts. The general rule is the more private the better, as it keeps unwanted attention away from accounts. For quick tutorials on adjusting these settings you can search (name of social media site) + (privacy settings) in your search engine of choice. Such a discussion can also be a good time to talk about what to post and what not to post on the Internet. Internet safety professionals advise not posting your full name, address, school, phone numbers, and schedules (for example, don’t post a status update stating, “Heading on vacation for a week!”).

Monitor. This can be hard when youth have access to the Internet almost everywhere. However, knowing the passwords and being connected on social media can help. You may also consider keeping the family computer in a common space and conducting random Internet searches for the youth’s name.

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Social Media Safety, continued

Use. As social media gets more integrated into our everyday lives, it can be easy to forget to be hyper vigilant about using it. There is a lot of benefit to reviewing tips for use with the youth in your care often. Some tips might include:

- Remember to be respectful of others.
- Even with the mask of the Internet, you are still connecting with another person.
- If you feel you are being cyber bullied, speak up, but not to the bully. Ask them to stop once but do not engage further; instead, tell an adult.

You may want to encourage youth to consider the following before posting: will this hurt my chances of getting a job/into college? What if this were to be shared over 100 times? Will these words or pictures hurt someone or put them in danger? How would I

feel if someone I really look up to read this?

For foster parents:

It is important to note that many agencies/counties have different policies about what can and cannot be shared on social media about the youth in your care.

Make sure to ask your worker to supply you with their policy before posting anything.

Also be aware that some social media sites “tag” your location when posting a picture, so make sure you check your privacy settings as to not put the youth in your care in a potentially dangerous situation.

The Internet can be a scary place. Following the above tips will help you navigate it with less worry and more enjoyment. With a few clicks of a button you will be surprised how quickly you can open up your foster care community and your world.

Resources

Coalition Tip Sheets

wifostercareandadoption.org

- The 411 on Social Media, Networking, and Texting
- Internet Safety Tips for Caregivers
- Cyberbullying, Social Networking, and You (tip sheet for youth)

Books

The Foster Parenting Manual, by Dr. John DeGarmo

Foster Care and Social Networking, by Eileen Fursland

Web Resources

Social Media Explained: Tips, tricks, links, and useful tools for some of the most popular social networks

<https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/hashtagNYU/social-media-explained.html>

Dangers of Social Media

<http://www.fosterfocusmag.com/articles/dangers-social-media>

5 Social Media Tips Every Foster Parent Should Know

<http://soshable.com/5-social-media-tips-every-foster-parent-should-know/>

Social Media: Tips for Foster Parents

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/smtips_parent.pdf

Beginner's Guide to Google+

<http://www.t5a.com/social-media/beginners-guide-google-plus/>

Stop. Think. Connect. Student Resources

<http://www.dhs.gov/publication/stopthinkconnect-student-resources>



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Looking Ahead: Conferences & Training Opportunities

Working with Birth Parents February 10, 2014



Like many skills in foster care and adoption, working collaboratively with birth parents is one honed over time, with patience and a bit of guidance. Join us for an educational evening with a trainer who has been there, done that, and wants to answer your questions.

For more information, or to register, please visit cyfbirthparents.eventbrite.com or call 414-475-1246.

Social Media Safety March 25, 2014

In this training, we will provide you with an overview of today's most active social media sites, as well as how to keep yourself and the children in your care safe. There is a lot to learn and we can help you get started!



For more information, or to register, please visit cyfsocialmedia.eventbrite.com or call 414-475-1246.

Attachment April 29, 2014

More information to come soon—keep in touch on wifostercareandadoption.org or via social media (see box at right).

Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA)



WFAPA provides great opportunities to get together with other foster parents through its spring and fall conferences. They also have an extensive website, wfapa.org, a newsletter, and a network of supportive WFAPA members and other foster parents who can be a resource for you.

The spring conference will take place on April 4 & 5, 2014 at the Wintergreen Resort in Wisconsin Dells.

Contact Us!

Please know that we are always here for additional information, resources, and support. You can contact us toll-free at **800-947-8074** or via email at info@wifostercareandadoption.org.

Find the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families on Social Media

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