

Supporting young people online

Information and advice
for adoptive
parents



The internet – an inspiring and positive place

The internet is an amazing resource which enables children and young people to connect, communicate and be creative in a number of different ways, on a range of devices.

However, the internet is always changing, and being able to keep up to date with your children's use of technology can be a challenge.

Issues that your child may encounter on the internet will vary depending on their age and online activities. We have grouped potential online risks into these 4 categories:



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Content:

Age-inappropriate, unreliable or illegal content can be available online. Talk to your child about what content is appropriate and what is inappropriate, and reassure them that they can always turn to you if something worries them online.



Conduct:

Children may be at risk because of their own behaviour. They need to show respect for other people online and to always be wary of giving away personal information to people they don't know online.



Contact:

Children can be contacted online by people who seek to bully or abuse them. Cyberbullying can be reported online and offline, and it helps to be aware of how to report or block abusive users. It's important for children to realise that new friends made online may not be who they say they are. If a child has been approached sexually online you should report to CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk).



Commercialism:

Young people can be unaware of hidden costs and advertising. Encourage them to keep their personal information private, learn how to block both pop ups and spam emails, turn off in-app purchasing on devices where possible, and use a family email address when filling in online forms.

What can I do right now?

- Maintain an open dialogue with your child – teach them to be kind online and to 'think before you post' and make sure they know they can always turn to you if anything worries them online, no matter what they've done.
- Create a family agreement to establish your children's boundaries, and your expectations, when on the internet.
- Consider using filters and parental controls to help block unwanted content.
- Give your child strategies to deal with any online content that they are not comfortable with – such as turning off the screen or using online reporting facilities.
- If your child is being bullied online, save all available evidence and know where to report the incident, for example to the school, service provider, or the police if the law has been broken.

Find out more about how to talk to children about online safety, how to set up parental controls and how to respond to concerns: www.saferinternet.org.uk/fostering-adoption

There are real advantages in maintaining an open dialogue with your children about their internet use.

Not sure where to begin? These conversation starter suggestions can help.

1 Ask your children to tell you about the websites and apps they like to use and what they enjoy doing online.

2 Discuss online safety together. What tips do they have for you, and where did they learn them? What is OK and not OK to share?

3 Ask them if they know where to go for help, where to find the safety advice, privacy settings and how to report or block on the services they use.

4 Encourage them to help someone! Perhaps they can show you how to do something better online or they might have a friend who would benefit from their help and support.

5 Think about how you each use the internet. Are there online activities that you could enjoy together?

Managing online contact with birth family members

The internet – and social networks in particular – can facilitate contact with your child's birth family. Most adopted children will have a natural curiosity about their birth family, particularly in their teenage years. They may turn to the internet to explore any unanswered questions, or they may be contacted directly by their birth family. There are a few ways you can help to manage this and it's important to start thinking about this with children of all ages.



Managing your family's online presence

- Use the privacy settings and reporting features on social networks.
- Be careful what you share. Make sure friends and family know what is appropriate too.
- Check how your child's school and youth groups share names and photos online.
- Google your family member's names and check what you can find.
- Remind your child not to accept friend requests from people they don't know.



Preparing for and responding to unmanaged contact

- Good communication is essential. Children need to feel able to ask questions about their birth family, and know they can talk openly with you about their feelings.
- Talk to your child about what they would do if a birth sibling or parent contacted them online.
- It can help to talk to them about why contacting birth family through social networks is not the best way to go about it, and why they should never arrange to meet up in person without telling you. If appropriate, you can explain the formal routes they can take if they want to make contact with their birth family.
- If you find out that your child is in touch with their birth family online, respond in a calm way and do not blame your child, even though you are probably feeling very shocked. It will be incredibly difficult for your child too, and by responding calmly, they'll know they can trust you. You can contact your adoption service to get advice and support.

Find out more about managing your family's online presence and dealing with unmanaged contact at:
www.saferinternet.org.uk/fostering-adoption.

Further advice and resources:

www.saferinternet.org.uk/fostering-adoption
www.childnet.com

If you need further support about any online safety issue, you can contact the UK Safer Internet Centre helpline for professionals working with children: www.saferinternet.org.uk/helpline

