

# Fostering

# Internet, Photographs and Mobile Phones

The Trust Board has granted the Chief Executive of the Sandwell Children's Trust the authority to approve this document.



**Sandwell**  
Children's Trust

# Internet, Photographs and Mobile Phones

## Regulations and Standards

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**

See also: **Think U Know CEOP**.

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## 1. Introduction

Different ways of communicating with friends are important to a child/young people and are now a way of life from an early age. When a child is placed with foster carers, it is important to find out their background and whether the internet, photographs and mobile phones contributed towards any abuse so that you can plan their use safely for all children but particularly those where it has been an issue.

Foster carers should ask their supervising social worker and the child's social worker for advice and information.

Carers' knowledge of different media will vary but it is important that they do all they can to safeguard children when using the internet and mobile devices.

The placement plan should identify any risks or issues associated with the use of a computer, mobile phone or gaming equipment particularly in relation to bullying, sexual exploitation or other risk-taking behaviours and where appropriate assess the risk and how safely to manage the child or young person's use.

If a foster carer is concerned in any way about a child's behaviour or the child expresses something that the carer is worried about in relation to social media, they should discuss this with their supervising social worker.

## 2. Web Enabled, Internet Technology/Social Networking

Foster carers should try and take part in a child's web browsing particularly for a new child in placement; school homework is an ideal opportunity for this. Foster carers should explain the web's positive and negative sides and tell them that if they are not sure about a site they should talk to you. Some useful guidelines are:

- Time limits on computers should be agreed with the child/young person;
- Appropriate internet security should be used on the computers to avoid access to inappropriate material;
- Carers should set clear ground rules on the use of the internet;
- Computers should be in areas of the house where adults can see what is being looked at rather than in a bedroom;
- If a young person has a laptop then decide with them where and when they can use it if they are accessing the internet;
- Carers should show an interest in the internet and encourage young people to be open about any concerns or problems;
- Never allow a child to arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they "meet" on the internet without first speaking to the child's social worker;
- The child should never respond to messages that are rude, threatening, or makes them feel uncomfortable. Encourage the child to talk to you about messages like this. If the child receives a message or sees something on-line that you are concerned about keep a copy and make a note in the daily record;
- Foster carers should discuss with a child/young person that people online may not be who they say they are.

Teaching the child to be cautious is important and can help when they start to use social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter.

Foster carers should ensure the child's profile and postings contain nothing that might expose their identity or whereabouts.

It is important that the child and the carer understand the site's terms and conditions.

Carers should try to equip the child with the skills to decide who to trust, even when they have not met the person face-to-face and talk to the child/young person about what makes a real friend.

Social networking sites are often used by perpetrators as an easy way to access children and young people for sexual abuse. **The Serious Crime Act (2015)** introduced an offence of sexual communication with a child. This applies to an adult who communicates with a child and the communication is sexual or if it is intended to elicit from the child a communication which is sexual and the adult reasonably believes the child to be under 16 years of age. The Act also amended the Sex Offences Act 2003 so it is now an offence for an adult to arrange to meet with someone under 16 having communicated with them on just one occasion (previously it was on at least two occasions).

Radical and extremist groups may use social networking to attract children and young people into narrow ideologies that are intolerant of diversity: this is similar to the grooming process and exploits the same vulnerabilities.

Children may be drawn to adopt a radical ideology through a failure to appreciate the bias in extremist material; in addition, by repeated viewing of extreme content they may come to view it as normal.

'Internet abuse' relates to four main areas of abuse to children:

- Abusive images of children (although these are not confined to the Internet);
- A child or young person being groomed for the purpose of sexual abuse;
- Exposure to pornographic or other offensive material via the Internet; and
- The use of the internet, and in particular social media, to engage children in extremist ideologies.

### 3. Photographs

If it is OK to take pictures or videos always ask the child's permission first and make sure they are clear on who will see them and why.

Foster carers should try and take photographs regularly of the child/young person to help record their life; it may also help when putting together their Life Story book.

Carers should be clear on who can give consent for the child to have their picture taken or be filmed for school etc.

### 4. Mobile Phones

Mobile phones offer, text messaging, taking pictures, sending and receiving them, sending and receiving video clips and sound tracks, as well as access to the internet which means a child can download pictures and videos.

With a camera phone, a child/young person can also send pictures of themselves, friends and where they live, which can have security implications for some looked after children.

Mobile phone network providers operate a barring and filtering mechanism to prevent those under 18 years accessing 18 rated content. The service can be provided for both contract and pay as you go phones. Foster carers are advised to explore this with the network provider that a child/young person uses or see what other services they offer.