SOCIAL MEDIA AND FOSTER CARE

Supporting a Trauma Sensitive Approach to Social Media and Digital Networking for Caregivers
Training Objectives

Participants will:

1. Gain understanding of the benefits and challenges of social media use.
2. Consider the impact of social media on supportive partnerships.
3. Determine how to utilize social media and maintain privacy and normalcy for youth and families.
4. Identify how trauma history may impact social media use.
5. Gain resources to support quality parenting that embraces social media.
Training Agenda

I. Benefits of Social Media for Caregivers
II. General Considerations for Caregivers
III. DCF Policy
IV. Helping Youth Navigate Social Media
V. Social Media Cautions – Trauma Sensitivity
VI. Social Media Resources
Social Media and Partnership Commitments

Partnership is critical to achieving successful outcomes for children and families with many needs in a complex system of care. All partners can work together to ensure that our verbal, written and social media communications are aligned with the partnership commitments.

Click image to view the Partnership Plan
Social Media and Partnership Commitments

When using social media keep in mind the following commitments from Florida’s Partnership Plan:

◦ 1. To ensure that the care we give our children supports their healthy development and gives them the best possible opportunity for success, caregivers and DCF, CBC and agency staff will work together in a respectful partnership.

◦ 2. All members of this partnership will behave professionally, will share all relevant information promptly, and will respect the confidentiality of all information related to the child and his or her family.
Benefits of Social Media for Caregivers

- May create a sense of community
- Social networking sites open up a new way to communicate with birth parents and other biological family members.
- Birth parents are able to use social networking to help in their healing process, as well.
- May encourage birth parent’s to work even harder on their case plan, in the hopes of reunification with their loved one.
General Considerations for Caregivers

Blogging publicly provides people with a platform to convey information to a wide audience.

There is power in your posts - use it to build, challenge respectfully, advocate and support.

Opportunity to share diverse perspectives in a respectful manner.

Align yourself with sites that assist you in being a quality caregiver.

Limit exposure of children in your care to individuals that may have an ulterior motive and use social media sites, specifically looking for children in foster care, as these children are often the most vulnerable.

In effect, while networking increases affiliation, it also increases risk, especially to youth - in our case, already vulnerable youth - who are learning how to deal with rejection and acceptance, affirmation and exploitation, beauty and truth.
General Considerations for Caregivers

- Use caution when posting your family’s actions, movements, weekend plans, and vacation destinations through social networks.

- While many posts do use an initial for the child’s name, the foster parent’s name is there, too. The groups posted in are often “closed,” but there is nothing to prevent someone who knows the family or the child from being a member of the group.

- It is amazing what social media can do and the connections it creates, even unwanted ones. But whether it is social media, or chatting with a friend, before speaking to anyone, anywhere, about a child you’re caring for in your home, consider privacy.

- Be knowledgeable of agency policies around social media.

Click on the image for a Kid President video on Things We Should Say.
What Would You Do?

- Stop for a moment and consider how you would apply what we have learned so far about respectful communication with all partners to the following situation.

- You are the caregiver for a female child who has a dependency case manager that is working with the child’s family toward the goal of reunification. The child, who is 8 years old, would like to swim during the summer and managing her long hair is very time consuming. You would like to cut her hair, so you contact the case manager, just to be sure. The case manager tells you that you are not allowed to cut her hair. You call another caregiver and they tell you that cutting hair is normalcy so you should go ahead and proceed with the haircut. A discussion among other parents ensues and there is apparent confusion because they are getting different responses from different case managers.

How would you communicate this confusion among the group of caregivers?

How would you communicate the confusion with the case management organization?
Children are permitted to participate in social media, computer usage, and have a cell phone as long as permission has been given by the caregiver.

Caregivers shall apply the reasonable and prudent parent standard to decision-making regarding social media usage. Caregivers should be sensitive to the risks of the various forms of social media.

Children have the right to self-disclose information about themselves on social media. Caregivers should educate children regarding the potential impact and ramifications of such disclosure.

Caregivers are permitted to post pictures on social media including children placed in their care. Caregivers may not use the child’s last name or identify the child as residing in out of home care.
Helping Youth in Your Care Navigate Social Media

- A 2010 PEW research report indicates that 93% of American teens have Internet access, and, of this number, 73% use a social networking site, a figure which has increased significantly compared to a 65% rate in 2008 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Internet access is increasing through the use of smart phones whether their own or a friend’s.

Youth in foster care are faced with the predicament that most of what is known about them is controlled by others.

Indeed, while our online ‘friends’ are usually no more than acquaintances otherwise, they do represent real connections to others in the physical world and online social media may provide a mechanism for connectiveness not otherwise available to youth (Heer & Boyd, 2005).

Indeed, it allows the foster child the opportunity to continue in a relationship that is important to him, allowing him to heal from the separation from his family.
Helping Youth in Your Care Navigate Social Media

- Coming up with a policy that prohibits Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat or other social media site use does little to deter youth who can quickly turn to other sites.

- Furthermore, prohibiting the use of online social media avoids dealing with the underlying issues (Boyd, Marwick, Aftab, & Koeltl, 2009). If anything, the online postings of our youth may be revealing problems or shortcomings in our existing systems of care that deserve our attention.

- In social media as in other aspects of life, teens watch what their parents do. Make sure your use of social media adheres to the guidelines you set for your teen – especially regarding his or her privacy.

- A good comprehensive resource for youth online safety is www.ConnectSafely.org
Social Media Cautions - Trauma History

- There is considerable evidence that use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) places people at risk of negative consequences (Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Fraser & Tucker, 2007). Risks include a range of difficulties such as cyberbullying, sexting, gaming addiction, exposure to pornography, and family arguments regarding ICT use (Finn & Kerman, 2003). The exponential increase in use of social networking sites has exposed all youth to these risks.

- Youth with foster care experiences may be especially vulnerable to ICT dangers due to their history of trauma and attachment difficulties.

- A child with a complex trauma history may be easily triggered or “set off” and is more likely to react very intensely. The child may struggle with self-regulation in knowing how to calm down and may lack impulse control or the ability to think through consequences before acting.

Click the image to view an article on Parenting Children with Trauma Experiences.
Use a Trauma Sensitive Lens

Adults must begin to see the world through the lens that children see the world through in order to create safety for the children in their care.

Trauma can have profound effects on a child’s healthy physical and psychological development. Children who have survived trauma often find it difficult to:

• Trust other people.
• Feel safe.
• Understand and manage their emotions.
• Adjust and respond to life’s changes.
• Physically and emotionally adapt to stress.
Essential Elements of Trauma Sensitive Care

◦ IMPACT OF TRAUMA
◦ FEELING OF SAFETY
◦ MANAGING EMOTIONS
◦ SUPPORT CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS
◦ HELP CHILD DEVELOP A STRONG SENSE OF SELF
◦ LOOK AT YOUR OWN RESPONSES
◦ TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
So what is a foster parent to do? You want to help the child you are fostering, but you may feel unprepared for the job, or just need some support from someone who has been there.

Can social media provide some solutions and support?
Social Media Resources to Support Caregivers

The following websites provide additional support and information that is helpful to caregivers:

Quality Parenting Initiative Florida
http://www.qpiflorida.org/

National Foster Parent Association
http://nfpaonline.org/

Foster Care Central
http://www.fostercarecentral.org

CF Operating Procedures
http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/HorizontalTab/DeptOperatingProcedures.shtml

Child Welfare Information Gateway
https://www.childwelfare.gov

Foster Parents on Social Media: Think Twice Before You Post!
When using social media keep in mind the commitments from Florida’s ___________.

a. Caregiver Plan  
b. Partnership Plan  
c. Operating Plan  

One of the benefits of social media for caregivers is that it may create a sense of _____.

- a. Community
- b. Hostility
- c. Criticism

______ was the acronym provided as a guide to consider before communicating.

- a. HELP
- b. POST
- c. THINK

When posting photos or information about children that is allowed in policy, it is still important to consider ___________ and ___________.

- a. privacy; trauma
- b. cost; location
- c. time; slang