Childnet International

Supporting young people online
Information and advice for foster carers

This leaflet includes practical advice to help foster carers discuss the online world with their child and support them in using it safely and positively.

For foster children, the internet is an amazing resource and can provide opportunities to:

- stay in touch with people such as siblings or friends from previous schools;
- build and maintain new friendships, helping them settle into a new environment or school;
- support education, seek help, be creative, and enjoy entertainment.

### Managing online risks for foster children

While all children need online safety education, some children in foster care may be prone to risk-taking or have a stronger desire to be accepted than their peers.

- Honest communication is key here, reassure them that they can come to you about anything.
- Supporting them with their internet use might take a little time, compromise, and communication. They may have had little help with their internet use before or have their own devices already.

Managing birth family contact online

Foster children may be curious about their birth family. They may search online for answers, be contacted online directly by their birth family or already be in contact with them online. It is important to start thinking about how you can help to manage this with children of all ages.

- 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 honestly about what they would do if their birth family contacted them online and what kind of contact, if any, is best to maintain safe boundaries.
- Use privacy settings to control who can contact your child online and who can see their online activity. For example, you can stop them being tagged in photos or posts on social media.
- Be aware that if you search for your child's birth family on social media, you or your child may appear in their 'people you may know' feature as suggested contacts.
- Remind your child not to meet up with anyone without telling you first.
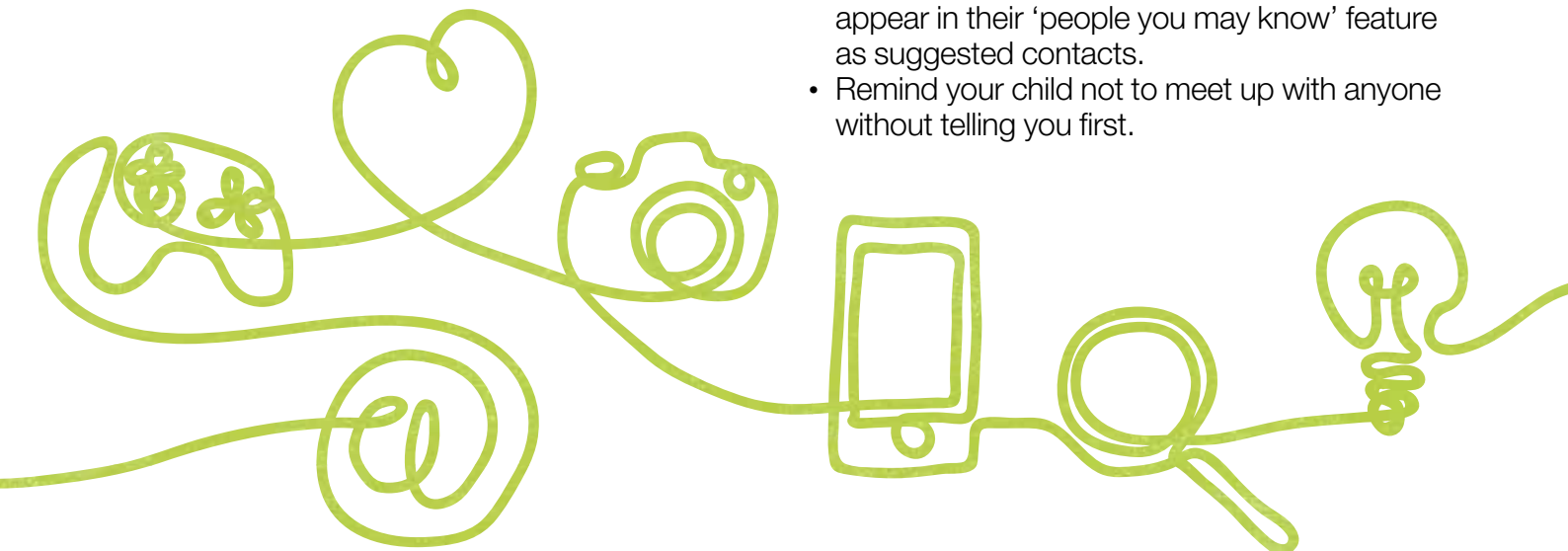
Responding to unmanaged contact

- If you find out that your child is in touch with birth family members, or someone inappropriate online, respond calmly and do not blame your child. Whatever emotions you are experiencing, this is also a difficult situation for your child. By staying calm, you are showing your child they can trust you.
- Work together with your child's social worker and contact the foster service to get advice and support.

Managing your family's presence and images online

What your family shares online can be seen by others and affects what can be found out about you. Consider what information you do not want to be public and take steps to keep this safe.

Managing your family's online presence

- Search your own family's names online and check what you can find.
- Discuss with your child what is ok or not ok to share online. Set a good example and make sure your child, friends, youth groups, school and family know what is appropriate to share too.
- Even with private accounts, information like their full name or date of birth could be seen by others, through usernames on games or social media profiles. Using a child's first name only or even a nickname is a safer option.

Managing images online

- Find safer ways to include your child in taking and sharing photos such as closed group chats or family photo-sharing apps. Ask those with access not to share further.
- Use social media privacy settings to control how private your child's photos are. Be aware that these settings do not stop others from uploading photos of your child.

Responding to photos and information shared about your child online

- If your child's image or personal information is publicly available online, the easiest way to remove it is to ask the person or organisation who posted it to take it down.
- On social media and online games, you can request to remove something by reporting it. The Childnet website includes **advice on how to make a report**.

How else can I support my child?

- Maintain an open dialogue with your child and agree on expectations around internet use by using **Childnet's Parents and Carers Toolkit**.
- For advice and information on a range of online safety topics, including grooming and cyberbullying, see **Childnet's advice on key topics**.
- Consider using filters and parental controls to help block unwanted content.

Find out more

Find out more from the **UK Safer Internet Centre** or **Childnet**.

Further support

For further support about any online safety issue, you can contact the **Professional's Online Safety Helpline**, run by the UK Safer Internet Centre for professionals working with children.

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TACT Fostering

Co-financed by the Connecting Europe Facility of the European Union