

Supporting young people online

Information and advice for adoptive parents

This leaflet includes practical advice to help adoptive parents discuss the online world with their child and support them in using it safely and positively. While all children need online safety education, some issues may be more relevant for adoptive children. However, good internet practice is generally the same for all children.

For children and adoptive children, the internet is an amazing resource which can:

- provide an opportunity to stay in touch with people;
- help build and maintain new friendships;
- provide opportunities for education, support, creativity, and entertainment.

Managing birth family contact online

Adopted children may be curious about their birth family. They may search online for answers or be contacted online directly by them. Make sure you and your child are ready before sharing their birth family's full name. It is important to think about how you can help to manage this with children of all ages.

- Good communication is essential. It is important children 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.
- Explain the formal routes they can take to contact their birth family if appropriate.
- 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 to always speak to you if they receive a friend request from someone they don't know, or an online friend asks to meet up.



Responding to unmanaged contact

- If you find out that your child is in touch with their birth family 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.
- Contact your adoption 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.

- 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 too.
- Be aware that usernames, profile pictures and social media bios are always public, even on private accounts. Make sure your child does not share information which makes them identifiable on these, such as their date of birth or full name. Using a child's first name only or even a nickname is a safer option.

Managing images online

- It is common to share photos online and children may become aware if they are excluded from joining in. 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. If it breaks the site's terms and conditions, it should be taken down. The Childnet website includes [advice on how to make a report](#).

How else can I support my child?

- Adoption UK run a national helpline which offers advice and support on all adoption related issues – please get in touch with an advisor on **0300 666 0006**.
- 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, and access to specific sites and pages, at home or on specific devices.
- Give your child strategies to deal with anything online they are not comfortable with – such as turning off the screen and speaking to you.

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