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To: Regional Managers
Directors, Local Offices, Department of Child Services

From: James W. Payne, Director
Angela Green, Deputy Director of Practice Support
Dave Judkins, Deputy Director of Field Operations
Jeff Lozer, General Counsel
Department of Child Services

Subject: Social Networking and Internet Usage
DCS-09-25

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) remains committed to protecting the confidentiality and safety of all children under the care and supervision of DCS. This letter outlines new DCS policy regarding the use of social networking and other internet sites.

Social networking – online communities of individuals who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. This may include but is not limited to: MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn.

Children under the care and supervision of DCS may be pictured or described and/or identified as foster children in the public media for any purpose, including recruitment, foster parent education, and public awareness **only** if the following apply:

1. DCS has determined that such exposure will not be harmful to the children and will not result in exploitation of the child; and
2. The child's parent(s), guardian, or custodian(s) have signed a release.

Note: If Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) has been finalized, no release is required.



Protecting our children, families and future

Resource parents are discouraged from posting photographs of foster children online. Resource parents are expected to keep confidential information about children in their care and should consider how posting photographs of children online might jeopardize their safety and confidentiality. If resource parents wish to post photographs of foster children on personal social networking pages, they must seek permission from DCS prior to posting any photos and may not identify the children by full name or as foster children. Additionally, resource parents who obtain permission to post photos must set restrictions on their social networking pages so that photographs of children in foster care are not available to be viewed by the general public.

It is anticipated that children in foster care will be interested in using the internet for a variety of purposes, including social networking. Children under the care and supervision of DCS are permitted to utilize these types of sites with appropriate supervision by their resource parent(s). Resource parents and children in foster care need to be aware that information posted or shared with others on the internet is not private. Even when using privacy settings, other people can view this information which is why it is essential not to post or share personal information online.

Resource parents and Family Case Managers (FCMs) are encouraged to have open conversations with children in their care about internet use and internet safety. FCMs should inquire about social networking and internet usage with all children on their caseload and discuss safe internet usage with youth in care and their caregivers. Some items to consider include, but are not limited to:

1. Checking the history of websites viewed to see what sites are being visited.
2. Using parental control tools. Internet service providers can provide guidance in this area.
3. Keeping the computer in a common or public area of the house.
4. Tell children not to post or share personal information about themselves online.
5. Prohibiting the posting of pictures with identifying information of children online – this should also include identifying information on clothing (names on jerseys, school letterman's jacket, etc.).
6. Telling children to inform you immediately if someone makes any kind of sexual, unsolicited, or threatening contact or message towards them.
7. Not tolerating any type of online or cyber bullying.

Updates will be made to the DCS Policy Manual to reflect these important changes.

If you have any questions related to this policy please address them to the DCS Policy mailbox at DCSPolicy@dcs.in.gov.

Sincerely,

James W. Payne, Director
Indiana Department of Child Services

