Youth in Care and Social Media Use

A Training Activity

The following scenarios represent examples of the unique experiences youth in foster care may have when online. It is important to not only think of the youth's behavior but also how the caregivers are responding. Use the prompts as discussion points with other professionals as well as for guidance should these scenarios arise.

Discussion Questions

Use these discussion questions to help guide professionals through the scenarios.

- What questions would you ask the caregiver and/or youth?
- What advice would you give to the youth?
- What advice would you give to the caregiver?
- How might the youth react to their rules?
  What other rules could you try?
- Are there things the caregivers could have done differently?

Working with Caregivers

Scenario #1

A caregiver was cleaning in their youth's room while they were at school and a message notification popped up on their computer. The caregiver immediately recognized the name of the youth's biological parent, who they are not supposed to have contact with. The caregiver called me and expressed her

concern about the contact and the youth not getting hurt again.

*It is possible for youth in foster care to be found online by family members they may not be allowed to have contact with. The **Best Practices** sections will go over strategies to minimize this risk.*

Scenario #2

A caregiver I work with requested to connect with me on Facebook. On their profile it lists that they are a foster parent and they have photos of the youth on their social media page. I was also able to find the youth's Facebook profile since the caregiver has them tagged in several photos and posts.

1. *Your state, agency, or department may have specific social media rules for workers, check your specific social media policies for guidelines on friending families.*

2. *As a general rule, caregivers should not post that they are a foster parent, the youth's name, or photos of the youth. This can make the youth easily identifiable online and can create a direct trail to them that can be used by family members who are not allowed to have contact and by online predators who would know their situation.*

Scenario #3

Several of the caregivers I work with have discussed having a strict no social media policy for all of the youth in their care. They do not allow the youth on any social media platforms. They think it's too dangerous and that predators will contact them or they will be exploited in some other way.

Youth in foster care can experience many benefits from being online such as connecting with others who are like them, building community with other youth or friends they have moved away from, and having more opportunities for self-expression. However, they do face certain risks. The risks and ways caregivers can help keep youth safe online will be discussed more in the **Best Practices** section.

Working with Youth in Care

Scenario #4

A youth on my caseload has asked for their own computer. They have expressed interest in a career in Information Technology (IT) and are taking a computer programming class at school. When they asked their caregivers for a computer they said they knew what they really wanted the computer for and would get into trouble online. The student needs their own laptop to join the robotics club
at school.

Computers are becoming increasingly necessary in the world of students. A 'digital divide' exists between youth in foster care and other students on the necessary computer skills they have and may need in the future (both at universities and in the work world). More information on the digital divide can be found in the research summary from **part 3** of this training.

Scenario #5

While checking in with a youth on my caseload, she mentioned being on a messaging app that lets her talk to people from all over the world. When I asked her more about the app she says it is safe since it's designed for youth only.

It is important to remind youth that anyone can create an account and set up a profile and lie about their age. Remind them that just because an app is designed for young people, it does not mean there aren't adults using the app or pretending to be younger.

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