

Confidentiality Addendum Cellphones/Facebook

Is it acceptable to share pictures I have taken of my family [foster child(ren) included] via cellphone picture messaging?

- Yes, as long as they are not identified as foster children or posted to the web. You must have the legal guardian sign consent to allow the children to be identified as “foster children” in pictures.

If a foster child leaves my home, am I (as a foster parent) required to delete pictures from my phone if that foster child is a part of the picture or are these pictures treated the same as if I printed out a copy to put in a frame for my home?

- You do not need to delete them, but the same guidance about identification as a foster child applies – you need a release signed by the legal guardian. If you donate/sell/recycle your phone, you should delete the pictures.

I have taken a picture of my whole family [foster child(ren) included] and I want to post it on Facebook so my relatives and friends can see and get a copy for themselves. I only tag the adults in the picture who have Facebook accounts and I do not include any identifying information about any of the children in the photo (foster or biological). Am I breaking confidentiality because I posted this picture on Facebook?

- DHS notes that children are vulnerable to people who may exploit them on the Internet, and it is important that foster parents try to minimize that exposure to the greatest extent possible.

Am I allowed to have access to the password to the child’s Facebook account to monitor their activity or is that the job of the birth parent/legal guardian?

- Foster parents are supposed to monitor internet usage, and that may include getting the password and monitoring the account if the situation warrants it. Who gets password access to the account should be the decision of the team. It may not be necessary for anyone to have password access.

Am I allowed to “friend” my foster child on Facebook to monitor their activity?

- Yes. The foster parents should set the security of their account at a level that does not allow other people to view their “friends” list.

If my foster child makes a comment about their “foster parent” or being a “foster child” and I am their “friend” on Facebook, does that status need to change, or can the relationship remain because the child broke their own confidentiality?

- The child simply mentioning “foster parent” or “foster child” will likely not reveal the identity of the foster parent unless the name is specifically mentioned. In some instances, there are protective concerns and it would be best if the foster parent “de-friended” for safety reasons. This is usually not the case, however. In these situations it is up to the foster parent whether or not they want to continue in “friend” status. The foster parents should discourage the foster child from revealing the identity of the foster parents on their Facebook page. If a foster child has a Facebook or similar-type account, foster parents should monitor the security settings so they are set at the highest (most secure) level possible.

If I have a foster child in my home that meets the age requirement for a Facebook page and wants to open an account, does the foster parent need to get written consent from the legal guardian/birth parent before that is allowed to happen?

- Yes. Most social networking sites require that a child be older than a certain age before they open an account, and it is important that foster parents monitor this so that the foster child does not violate the site's terms of usage.

What if the birth parent/legal guardian says no to a Facebook page, but the child opens one anyway and I (as the foster parent) find out? Who is responsible for handling the discussion and enforcement of the policy?

- Foster parents are supposed to monitor a child's internet usage so hopefully this will not happen. Foster parents should coordinate with workers and birth parents to determine who handles the conversation and response with the child. In many cases, the birth parent and child benefit from the birth parent playing an active role in dealing with behavioral issues.

What role do I (as a foster parent) play in a situation where my foster child is not supposed to have contact with their birth parent, but the birth parent has sought out the child out on Facebook and they are now "friends"?

- This is a delicate situation and should not be handled in a manner that punishes the child; it is natural and normal for the child to want to have some type of contact with their birth parents. The reasons that the Court and DHS do not allow contact with birth parents vary, but in most instances, the reasons relate to a threat to the child's safety/well-being, or to the parents' rights being terminated. It is important to contact the child's DHS worker as soon as possible if the parent is violating a court order that prohibits contact, or going against the direction of the guardian in cases which termination of parental rights has occurred.



Answers provided by:
Heather Davidson
Foster Care Program Manager
Department of Human Services
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