

Mobile devices, phones and social media in out of home care

How to support a child or young person in your care with mobile phones, mobile devices and social media.

We live in a technology rich world where mobile phones are an important tool. Mobile phones and social media can present opportunities as well as risks to children and young people. This can include inappropriate or harmful content, cyberbullying and privacy breaches. These opportunities and risks can have profound impacts on their mental health and development.

This guide aims to empower foster carers to support the children and young people in their care. Children and young people may enter care with a mobile device, phone or social media. Or they may ask for them during their time in care.

What carers **must** do

- talk with children and young people about mobile phone and social media rules they had before entering care (if they enter care with access).
- discuss responsibilities of using a mobile device, phone or social media with the child or young person (they must consider the child or young person's developmental age, maturity, views and household circumstances).
- include children and young people in discussing and agreeing on household rules.
- inform the Child Safety Officer if they know or suspect that there is illegal content (or abuse) on a child or young person's mobile device, phone or social media.
- notify the Child Safety Officer as soon as possible if they have removed a phone where they believe it poses a risk to the child or young person.

What carers **can** do

- discuss with the child or young person when it is appropriate to get a mobile device or phone or use social media ([Are they old enough? | eSafety Commissioner](#)).
- talk with children and young people and make decisions about parental controls, screen time and supervision.
- discuss and set household rules (including amount of use and consequences for not following agreed rules). This can include removing a phone, but needs agreement from child or young person, Child Safety Officer and carer. Consequences which do not require the removal of the phone should be prioritised.

- remove a phone from a child or young person (without prior agreement) if the carer believes the phone use poses a **risk** and a Child Safety Officer is unavailable (in the interests of the safety of the child or young person).
- look at the contents of a mobile device or phone (if there is a reasonable belief there are things on the phone that are offensive or risky to the child, young person or others). This should be done in a trauma informed way with the child or young person's consent and presence. The carer can seek support/advice from the Child Safety Officer if needed. The carer should not look at the contents if they believe it is illegal – they must contact the Child Safety Officer for support.
- sign school validation forms for social media approval (this includes permission to have photos shared of the child or young person on DECYP's social media). Carers should consider a child or young person's privacy when consenting and ask for and respect the child or young person's view.
- discuss and make decisions with children and young people in their care about what social media accounts are safe and appropriate. Decisions about social media must be made in line with this guide and legislation, taking into consideration that the child or young person is legally allowed to use the platform and is developmentally ready.
- post photos that include children in their care. Carers should include children and young people in a conversation about the content and seek their consent ([Privacy and your child | eSafety Commissioner](#)). Personal details of the child or young person in care **must not** be shared (including that they are in care, name, address, family history, or school the child or young person is attending).

What carers **cannot** do

- post photos that identify children and young people as being in care.
- use tracking/monitoring through a child's mobile device or phone. (Exceptional circumstances for safety reasons can be discussed with the Child Safety Officer).

What children and young people can do

- talk with their carer about their thoughts on having a mobile device or phone.
- be supported to access social media platforms (in line with legal age limits).
- share safe photos on their social media, but it is recommended that they do not identify:
 - their personal details (such as address, family history, or school they are attending).
 - details of their carer(s).
- have a say in decisions that affect them, including when and what devices and social media platforms they would like to have and use.
- ask for help from their carer or Child Safety Officer (for example if they need advice, are being bullied or feel unsafe).

The responsibilities of children and young people in care

- keep agreed household rules around use of devices and social media.
- not contact people who have been assessed as unsafe.
- use their phone in a lawful way (for example do not bully or share nude photos).