

# Aspiranet

---

~ March 2021 ~

## Monthly Regulation Topic

---

### Online Safety for Children & Teens

With the ongoing pandemic, children and teens are spending greater amounts of time online as a result of sheltering at home, distance learning, and the necessity for continued social distancing. In addition to being online to participate in remote schooling, many children and youth are now more than ever socializing online –connecting with friends and family, gaming, posting on social media, etc. As a result, they are spending large amounts of time each day in a digital world – where there are risks and potential dangers.

As we know, it is vital that parents monitor their children and teen’s online activity. Understanding what your children or teens do online is vital to protecting them from potential dangers. Teaching your children about the online risks and how to avoid or report threats is one of the most important steps you can take to ensure their safety online.

Below are some suggestions to help reduce risk:

#### ***Talk with your Children***

Maintain open communication with your children and teens so that you can talk with them about the benefits and dangers of the Internet, social media and texting.

Let them know you are looking out for their safety and be sure to listen to their questions and concerns.

An open conversation can help them feel comfortable talking with you even about uncomfortable things they may later experience online. Let them know they can come to you if they are uncomfortable or scared about something they encounter online.

Be involved in their online and cell phone activities, including knowledge of their favorite web and social media sites, online games, and interests. Ask your children to show and teach you what they already know about the internet and social media. As a parent, you can learn about your child’s knowledge level and activities, and it’s a great way to open up communication while having fun together.

#### ***Develop Household Online Guidelines***

It is important to establish guidelines for computer, internet and cell phone use for your family. Ideally, the guidelines are developed together as a family, written and posted in the home. It is recommended the guidelines include, but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- Do not post or share personal information (name, age, address, phone number, school, or post photos that can identify location, etc.)
- No posting of photos on public sites of any kind
- No sharing of passwords (except with resource parents)
- Time limits for screen time, including cell phones, tablets, etc.
- Online activities are done in “common” areas of the home, where monitoring can occur
- Central cell phone charging location at night (outside children/teen’s bedroom)
- Avoid strangers: No chatting with unknown individuals; do not open email or respond to text from someone unknown
- Never agree to meet in person with someone met online
- Online etiquette: If you wouldn’t say or do something in person, do not do it online
- Inform resource parents (or other trusted adult) if someone unknown tries to contact you or if someone makes you feel uncomfortable, threatened, or bullied

## ***Use Parental Control Software***

There is a variety of software available to help parents manage their children's internet experience, and reduce the chance of inappropriate access or interactions.

Install parental control software to block inappropriate websites and limit "screen time". Age-appropriate filtering and blocking software is available for all internet-enabled devices used by your child, including laptops, tablets, cell phones and video games.

While this type of software will not eliminate your need to be involved in your children's online activities, it will help to reduce some of the immediate risks to children that are inherent to the internet.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Due to children and youth having the personal right to make and receive confidential communication, including electronic communication, parental control software may not be used for the purpose of preventing communication or reviewing/reading a child/youth's electronic communications.

## ***Other Safeguards Parents Can Take***

- Identify age-appropriate websites and social media sites together with your child/teen. NOTE: the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule* is a law that requires children must be *at least 13 years* old to open any social media accounts or download social media apps.
- Check your child/youth's browser history regularly
- Watch for changes in your child/teen's behavior that may indicate cyberbullying or contact with an online sexual predator. Children and teens in foster care are especially vulnerable to being bullied and sexually exploited and/or trafficked. Consider changes in behavior, including AWOLing and signs of emotional distress, including depression, anxiety, fearfulness, paranoia or becoming withdrawn. Share concerns with your Aspiranet Social Worker.
- Be open with your children/teens about monitoring their online activity. It's important to maintain their trust and also maintain their personal right to have privacy of electronic correspondence – including sending and receiving confidential email and text messages. However, this does not prohibit resource parents from asking who your child or youth is communicating with and attempt to maintain open communication about their online activities. Again, if a concern arises, please discuss with your Aspiranet Social Worker.

## ***Protecting Privacy & Confidentiality***

As resource parents, one of your most important responsibilities is to protect your child or youth's privacy and confidentiality. While foster children and youth have the right to confidential electronic communication, it important that foster parents educate children/youth and help them to understand the importance of protecting their privacy at all times.

As noted, social media and electronic communication especially now during the pandemic has become a significant part of children and youth's social life. And because socializing with peers is so important to youth, their online interactions can become quite intense and focused. To help youth to protect themselves and their privacy the following suggestions are provided:

- Enforce household rules around prohibiting posting or sharing of any personal information that may identify them. Also, strongly encourage youth to *not* use their first and last name in their email address or other electronic communication that may show their "online" name.
- Explain the consequences of posting information online; even something that in the child/youth's view seems appropriate or "innocent" may have lasting consequences. For example, a youth's privacy and reputation can be negatively impacted by a "simple" post or photo that is shared.
- Remind youth that once they post something online, it is no longer under their control. Educate them that anyone can take something they posted and send it all over the internet without their permission or knowledge.
- Help children/youth to find the privacy settings are on their favorite web sites and help them consider the settings they should use.

Please sign and return this page to your Aspiranet Social Worker for training credit.

My signature below indicates that I have completed the March 2021 "Online Safety for Children and Teens" training.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature Foster Parent #1*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Print Name Foster Parent #1*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature Foster Parent #2*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Print Name Foster Parent #2*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Aspiranet Authorized Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

Training credit: \_\_\_\_ minutes