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## GOOD PRACTICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

### FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA POSITION:

Carer networks/ groups (face to face or via social media) can be a very useful tool for carers to access mutual support and advice between peers. However, it is important to apply good sense to communication and participation in these forums given carers' ethical and legal obligations to maintain the confidentiality of children, young people and their families.

### USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Despite the existence of privacy options, many items published in social media are publicly accessible and it can be difficult to guarantee that sites are fully private. As such always start with the assumption that anything you say can be read by anyone, anywhere, at any time and remember that the Internet has a long memory. Even comments made in a "closed" group can be subject to legal action if considered defamatory or harmful to other people's reputations.

Carers should always be cognisant of their legal obligations to respect the confidentiality of the children and young people for whom they care. Breaches of confidentiality can incur significant penalties pursuant to both the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*. Breaches of confidentiality can also result in Quality of Care investigations or other disciplinary actions which may have serious ramifications for carers.

Most importantly, carers should always respect that children, young people and their families have the same rights to privacy that all Victorians are entitled to. This is clearly stated in the *Charter for Children in Out-of-Home Care* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

### GOOD PRACTICE

**Respect confidentiality.** All carers undertake to respect confidentiality agreements established by their foster care agencies. This applies to carers' interactions on social media as much as anywhere else. Under no circumstances should any identifying information be given about a child, young person or their family members. Never enter into any discussions with other people on any forum regarding the child or young person in your care and/or their family members, particularly parents.

**Ensure stringent privacy settings.** Carers should always check the terms and conditions of the social media platforms being used and ensure the strongest possible privacy settings are in place to limit viewers of these platforms.

**Don't break the law.** Do not post comments which are defamatory, discriminatory, incite violence, infringe copyright or are otherwise unlawful. There are clear penalties under Victorian criminal and civil legislation that could apply to carers found to be liable under these laws.



**Be polite.** Treat other people in your group (electronic or face to face) with respect and courtesy. Avoid comments using inappropriate or malicious language about others (including children and young people, their family members, DHHS or foster care agency staff). Do not post comments that you would not say directly to another person and consider how other people might react before you post.

#### COMPLAINTS

Negative comments about foster care agencies and their staff, or DHHS and its staff on social media can compromise a partnership approach to the care of children and young people. While carers may feel "better" for voicing their frustrations in an electronic forum, issues are unlikely to resolve and inappropriate advice may be offered by other participants.

Carers should always raise concerns with their agencies or the Department of Health and Human Services through the appropriate feedback / complaints procedures. The Carer Information and Support Service can provide advice and, if required, assistance to carers to resolve issues concerning them.

Please refer also to FCAV's Information Sheet *Photos & Social Media* on our website at [https://www.fcav.org.au/images/carer-resources/information-sheets/Photos\\_and\\_Social\\_Media.pdf](https://www.fcav.org.au/images/carer-resources/information-sheets/Photos_and_Social_Media.pdf)

Carers should familiarise themselves with the DHHS Policy regarding photos and social media: <https://www.fcav.org.au/images/carer-resources/information-sheets/DHS-Information-Sheet-for-Carers--social-media-and-foster-care.pdf>