

A Social Media User Guide for Foster and Kinship Carers

Life Without Barriers (LWB) recognises that social media platforms offer a powerful way for people to connect, communicate and engage with each other, and that as foster carers, you may use social media in a personal capacity.

The safety and well-being of children in our care and carers, who play the vital role of supporting and safeguarding them, is a priority for LWB. With all the benefits of social media, the unfortunate reality is there can be negative conduct and commentary. This guide is designed to help you be aware of potential risks in using social media when you represent yourself as a foster or kinship carer and of your obligations. This guide will also help you exercise judgement and act responsibly when engaging on social media. As an LWB carer, we encourage you to consider these guidelines along with your state's Carer Code of Conduct, Rights and Responsibilities, child protection legislation, and LWB's We Put Children First guidelines to ensure risk from negative social media is reduced as much as possible for you and that the identity of children in your care are protected.

What is Social Media?

Social media platforms are tools that allow for freely generated content, including imagery, such as drawings, photos, audio and video, for the purposes of sharing information and ideas and engaging with others.

Examples of social media channels:

- Social networking sites e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn etc
- Micro-blogging sites e.g. Twitter
- Video and photo sharing websites e.g. YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, TikTok
- Weblogs, including corporate and blogs (personal or hosted by media outlets) e.g. WordPress
- Chatrooms, discussion boards and forums such as Yahoo!, Whirlpool or Google groups
- Instant messaging e.g. WhatsApp, Snap Chat, Facebook Messenger, Messenger Kids etc.

Social media communication includes material such as posts, comments, replies to comments, conversations, blogs, photos, videos etc. posted on social media channels.

Guiding Principles

The privacy of children in care must be protected at all times

As Carers and staff of Life Without Barriers, you deal with sensitive content. Please respect the confidentiality of children and families by adhering to the following rules:

- Do not discuss or disclose photos or other forms of identifying information about children in care and their families
- Do not share information posted in this forum on other sites or in other conversations

1. Commenting on social media makes it a public comment

When posting information online, it is important to remember that regardless of privacy settings, there is no such thing as a 'private' social media site. Any comment you make about children in your care, other carers, staff or LWB on a social media site is a public comment. This includes private Facebook groups – so please do not share any photos of children or share their names.

2. Social media has a global reach

When you post a comment on a social media site, it instantly becomes accessible to a global audience. Moreover, when you attach a hashtag (#) to your post, it becomes visible to anyone

searching for that particular hashtag. You may be able to limit the visibility by adjusting your privacy settings. However, privacy settings differ in each social media channel.

3. Content posted online could remain online indefinitely

Content once posted is likely to remain online even if you delete it from your account. This could be because your posts are shared by other members of the community or because of the information management policies of the social media channel you are posting to.

4. You are responsible for what you post

You are responsible for what you post on your personal social media accounts. It is recommended that you only do or say on-line what you would off-line or in public. Take into consideration the LWB Code of Conduct.

5. Unintentional breach of privacy or confidentiality is a serious risk

Disclosure of confidential or personal information of children and young people is a serious risk and has serious ramifications. Carers are encouraged to use discretion when posting on social media so you avoid the risk of children and young people being identified.

What can I post as a carer?

As foster and kinship carer with LWB, you represent the organisation in your communities. LWB encourages you to uphold the values you committed to when undertaking the vital role you play, and engage through social media in an appropriate and respectful manner.

You are encouraged to:

- Be mindful that what you post on social media sites may be taken out of context and open you up to personal attacks or online trolling. This is particularly the case when posting in online communities that deal with sensitive topics;

If you do want to post advice online or ask a question try broad terms:

Instead of: Hunter (5 yrs) has just started school at Valentine Public and won't get dressed in the morning. What have you tried that works?

Try: Our LO (little one) just started school but refuses to get dressed of a morning – what have you tried that works?

You can also use:

- *Little Miss (LM)*
- *Mr Teenager*
- *Miss Teenager*
- *Young Adult*
- Ensure all communication on social media is respectful;
- When expressing an opinion about LWB matters, clearly state that it is your personal opinion;
- Share communication from official LWB social media channels to your personal accounts but take care if adding personal commentary to the post;
- If you have posted any material in relation to your role as a carer and are unsure if you have breached the law or your obligations as a carer, please remove the material immediately and seek advice from your local LWB office
- Be aware of your online 'friends' and contacts when using social media sites and activate appropriate privacy settings on those sites. This could help improve your online safety and information security as well as that of the children and young people in your care

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR CARERS

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- Notify the Digital Content Team(digitalcontent@lwb.org.au) if you become aware of any complaints about LWB on public social media pages or online forums
- Seek immediate advice from the Media Team (Media@lwb.org.au) if you are approached by media about LWB-related matters through your social media accounts.

You are advised not to:

- Identify yourselves as LWB employees, carers, volunteers or affiliates when using social media sites;
- Disclose information about children and young people in your care or discuss LWB business whether confidential or not;
- Imply that your communication is authored or sanctioned by LWB;
- Imply authorisation to speak on behalf of LWB or LWB endorsement of personal views;
- Use the LWB name to endorse products, causes or opinions;
- Post any trademark, logo or copyrighted artwork of LWB to social media;
- Display any photographs or other images of children and young people in your care
- Disparage or denigrate other carers or LWB staff members;
- Attempt to defend LWB from any negative commentary in online communities. Due to the highly complex nature of our work, sometimes LWB may be the focus of negative media interest. At such times, your well-meaning comments could be taken out of context or expose you to personal attacks. Instead, please seek immediate advice from your local LWB office.

If you have further questions about these guidelines, please email digitalcontent@lwb.org.au