Internet Safety Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, advances on the internet have changed completely in the way we communicate with each other, share and store information, expand our knowledge, go shopping, book holidays, and build and expand friendship networks. For many parents and carers, the internet is still a novelty – for children growing up now, the internet is a fact of life and their lives will be increasingly 'web' based, whether on their personal computers, games consoles, mobile telephones, at home or at school. While the benefits it can offer, with regards education and learning are immeasurable, it can also pose risks and possible harm for young people. Fortitude Fostering believes that safe care and responsible internet use should not be 'self-taught' but, rather, that families and households work together in understanding the best way to stay safe online. It is worth remembering that children in care, are particularly vulnerable. They may be at risk from contact from friends or family members, when it might not be in their best interests to be contacted – there is a chance that revealing their care status could make them particularly exposed to inappropriate behaviour or grooming, or online bullying. It is also worth remembering that carers, and people who work with children in care can also be vulnerable; children in their care may want to contact family and friends on line – they may make allegations and accusations on line, they may, as a result of their backgrounds or previous home environments, participate in bullying and information they disclose online could compromise your role as a carer.

2. STAYING SAFE

Most young people would consider the internet a central part of their life; as they communicate – whether amongst their immediate friends, their school or as part of a much larger social group. Unfortunately, what a person may say or do online, is not necessarily the same as what they would say to somebody's face; by sitting at a personal computer they are detached from the people they are communicating with and the internet can often be used negatively. The fact that harmful messages or contact can take place at any time, and within the home, also means that for many people who may be at risk online, there is no respite or refuge. We recommend that Carers implement the following safety recommendations:

- Personal information should never be given out or displayed online – age, gender, address, telephone numbers, passwords and PIN numbers. If you need to use personal details to purchase goods online, only use a trusted and secure website.
- Friends' you make online are strangers – you have never met them personally, and all you know about them is what they have chosen to tell you. We know that young people do meet people they have befriended on the internet. If a young person, in your household, wants to meet someone offline, it must be fully supervised by their parent or carer, in a public place or venue.
- Report any behaviour which you consider threatening, inappropriate, frightening or bullying. There are list of sites where you can report, in the appendix at the back. As the internet changes, the basic principles of what young people go online for and the basic principles of staying safe remain almost unchanged. For the vast majority of children, participating online allows them to:

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- Chat
- Message
- Network
- Game

2.1 Chat

Most people will be aware of 'chat rooms' – this is a site where large numbers of people can communicate simultaneously, in a form of online conference. Chat rooms can be 'standalone' or they can be a part of a wider site. Users are able to talk, swap information such as music files or images, build friendships and create virtual environments, similar to those found in console games. As internet use widened, chat rooms, initially, attracted a great deal of criticism, as they were being seen as a means to groom children and young people and incidents of inappropriate and harmful behaviour, as a result of contact in chat were not uncommon. Since then, chat rooms have become increasingly moderated – either by employees or volunteers on the site, who remove or report offensive and suspicious activity or by filters in the programs which are triggered by specific words or phrases.

2.1a. Chat Safe

- Chat Awareness – the best way to ensure safe care online, is to be as informed as possible about sites that children like to use. We don't expect carers to become computer experts, but it is helpful if you speak to the young people in your home and understand what they are getting out of the internet.

- Young people find using chat rooms and messaging an easier way to express their feelings. Advise children in your home not to reveal personal information or email addresses with people they have not met in real life. Many chat sites, aimed at teenagers, are specifically aimed at dating and finding relationships and you should consider whether it is appropriate that the children in your home should access them.

- Language – chat users will abbreviate and shorten words to make it quicker to communicate, much like texting ('A/S/L' – Age, Sex, Location, 'POS' – Parent over shoulder, 'LOL' – Laugh out loud). This can be confusing but sites such as **Thinkuknow (https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/)** have glossaries of chat speak.

2.2. Messaging

Instant Messaging, or IM, is a form of simultaneous 'chat' – unlike chat rooms, where users are able to speak to strangers in a shared spaced, instant messaging takes place between people who possess each other's phone numbers or social networking site friends lists, as a user receives more 'friends', they can increase the size of their network and, with the default settings on all IM providers, it is extremely easy to add new friends to a chat network. Unlike chat rooms, IM is not moderated.

2.2a Safe Messaging

- Address lists – many young people will be very competitive in expanding their friends lists, adding as many friends as possible. Email addresses and phone numbers can be traded and young people may not discriminate as to who they add to their contacts. This can lead to them allowing people into their networks, who may be looking to harm, bully or inappropriately contact vulnerable young people.

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- Moderation – although moderators in chat rooms and forums do not have to undergo checks, as a carer would, they still offer some form of protection against offensive or threatening behaviour. IM is not moderated and so users should be especially careful at to what information they reveal, even amongst people they consider 'friends'. Messaging
- Bullying – Instant Messaging can be used to bully and intimidate. Threats, name calling, offensive or altered images can be shared very quickly and easily across friend networks.
- Personal contact – Instant Messaging enables users to communicate directly through mobile phones or webcams. They also allow for very fast and easy to- use photograph and file sharing. The implications are that young people could risk compromising themselves by sending images, or having screen images 'captured' and that by sharing images, even with friends, they no longer have any control over them.

2.3. Social Networking

Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Instagram and Snap Chat are websites which allow users to build networks of friends, through shared interests, and can then be expanded with addition of mutual friends. SNS are one of the fastest growing phenomena on the internet, and, at the time of writing, sites such as Facebook currently have over 2.38 Billion users in 2019. They present many of the risks associated with chat rooms and instant messaging, but they also pose problems that are unique to Social Networking. Any contact within an SNS is not moderated and, although age restrictions apply to virtually all sites, these can be easily over ridden and are not compulsory. With regards fostering, there are concerns around contact and allegations – increasingly, there are incidents where children in care are using SNS to directly contact parents and birth relatives and to post accusations and allegations against their carers. Similarly, carers have disclosed confidential information and revealed the identity of children in their household.

2.3a Safe Social Networking

As with IM and Chat Rooms, SNS create the chance for inappropriate behaviour and contact.

- Privacy – SNS default settings allow users to place a large amount of personal information (telephone numbers, home and work addresses, email addresses) in the public domain on their profile page. Carers, and the children they care for, should check the privacy settings of the site they are using to ensure that their contact details are hidden.
- Bullying – SNS allow bullies the opportunity to rapidly disseminate threats, intimidating messages, images and accusations across a very large number of people, in a very short space of time. Social Networking Sites (SNS)
- Control – Social Networking lets users create, potentially, constantly growing networks of friends, through connecting with mutual friends or with people who share the same interests. This can mean that posts, photographs and shared messages can be seen and read by people outside your friends list.
- Inappropriate and Illegal Behaviour – many Social Networking Sites allow members to form and join online groups who promote or condone illegal activity (car cruising, substance misuse, football violence, possess racist, homophobic or extremist views), which would be unsuitable for both carers and children in care.

2.4. Gaming

For many young people, online and console gaming is the most popular way of spending their free time, combining both the opportunity to play games whilst interacting with other gamers, either within their own friends' network or across the world. Online gaming takes two forms; either through web based games or through games consoles, such as the XBOX or PlayStation . Games such as Fortnite and Minecraft offer 'real time' gaming, where players can interact with each other to complete missions or tasks, in pursuit of virtual rewards, and many respects, players would communicate much as they would through a chat room, with similar levels of moderation. In the last few years, console games have expanded rapidly into the online gaming market to that extent that most new games now are solely for online use.

2.4a Safe Gaming

- Time – one of the main issues concerning online gaming, is the amount of time that players spend online. As many consoles and personal computers are kept in bedrooms, and so effectively unsupervised, there is a risk that time spent gaming could encroach on school work, family time and socialising.
- Age Appropriateness – many games now are aimed at an adult market, with strong language, sexual content, violence or references to substance misuse and criminal activity. Games are given age ratings, similar to DVD's and carers and parents should ensure that children in their household are not exposed to content unsuitable for their age group and abilities. All consoles now have parental controls, which can be password set to limit time spent playing, the types of game played and the online contact list of the user.
- Inappropriate Behaviour – as with Instant Messaging, people can play online with friends or in open forums, with strangers. Incidents of abusive language, threats, intimidation and bullying are not uncommon. There have also been occasions where young people have been contacted through online games, as part of a grooming process.

3. MOBILE PHONES

With improvements in technology, a far wider range of tariffs available to consumers and internet access available on the vast majority of mobile telephones, it is now both easy and relatively cheap, for people to use their phone much as they would a personal computer or tablet. The increase of internet enabled phones, combined with the fact that virtually all phones now have cameras and video, has created a number of concerns:

- Internet Access – it is possible now for young people to have instant, unsupervised access to the internet from their mobile handset.
- Photographs and Videos – the rise of camera phones has led to new trends, namely 'happy slapping', where incidents of violence or abuse are recorded and then broadcast and 'sexting', where users will record and send indecent images or sexually explicit text messages. Just as images shared online are beyond their owners control once sent, so too are those taken and shared from a mobile telephone.
- Bullying – mobile telephones have long been a way of intimidating, threatening or harassing people. 'Pay as you go' SIM cards are now so cheap and freely available means that it is possible for the bully to remain anonymous.

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4. WHAT FOSTER CARERS SHOULD KNOW

The fastest growing online community now, especially with regards Social Networking Sites, are not children and teenagers but adults, especially amongst adults aged from 35 to 50. Hence we accept that most Fortitude Fostering Carers will have some form of presence now on the internet, through membership of SNS or online groups and forums. As an agency, we believe that a level of safe care must be exercised to ensure not only the wellbeing of the child in your care, but also that of you and your own household.

- Confidentiality – we would advise you not to reveal or broadcast your status as a carer. Such information can reach a large number of people very rapidly and, once broadcast, is beyond your control.
- Inappropriate Contact – it is recommended that children in your care do not reveal their names or any personal details online; use nicknames instead and don't post up photographs. If you need to use an avatar (an image which illustrates your profile), use a cartoon or non-related image. If carers are storing photographs online, use the privacy settings to prevent them being accessed, unless by people approved to do so - do not keep school photographs or any which might indicate where the child may be based.
- Allegations and Accusations - Report! If you, or a member of your household, have allegations made against you, which are circulated across the internet, report them immediately and do it as soon as possible to your Supervising Social Worker; the longer an accusation or untruth stays on the internet, the more widely it can spread

5. SAFE CARE – PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Keep computers and, where possible, games consoles in open spaces or shared family areas.
- Set limits for the amount of time a young person can go online.
- Understand what sites children and young people like to use – ask them about what they enjoy using about the internet and how the sites work.
- If you have a games console in your house – read the instructions. Parental controls and filters are very straightforward to use and Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony have excellent, easy to understand websites offering support and guidance.
- Speak to your supervising social worker if you have any concerns or suspicions about the child you care for, which might relate to their use of the internet; mood swings, irritable behaviour, unwilling to socialise or share information, are withdrawn or possibly aggressive.

6. SAFE CARE – REPORTING ABUSE

- CEOPS (Child Exploitation Online Protection Service). https://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/
- Their partner Thinkuknow (https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/), offers a wide range of support for parents and carers, and children and young people – it has updates and

developments on internet misuse, teaching aids and educational videos and, most importantly, a reporting facility

- A button, found on the Thinkuknow site, and also on sites who have agreed to sign up to CEOPS reporting facility allows users to immediately report abuse. If you or the child in your household has any concerns, click the button – choose from a list of issues (cyberbullying, hacking accounts, viruses, mobile telephones, harmful content, sexual behaviour) – it will then offer both advice around the issue and, if necessary, an option to report the incident to CEOPS with further support (such as Childline) available, if necessary. Safe Care – Practical Considerations It suggests instead that users maintain their privacy settings, in order to self-regulate posts and content.
- It is worth remembering that a parent or carer has no legal rights to the content of their child or foster child's site and Facebook will not intervene on your behalf. It is recommended that if you do have concerns over Facebook content, report not only to Facebook but also to CEOPS, by sending them a link or screen grab of the page.
- Mobile Telephones. All UK mobile phone companies have facilities to deal with nuisance calls. If a user is receiving nuisance calls or texts, they can change that person's number and, with the involvement of the police, block the person making the calls.
- Games Consoles. The three leading console manufacturers, Microsoft (XBOX 360), Sony (Playstation) and Nintendo (Wii) all offer advice and guidance on safe gaming, setting parental controls, a reporting facility and regular updates.
- Make a note of which site you were using, and record the full address for any reporting – the best way to do this is via a 'screen grab', which will record exactly what is showing on your screen at that time. To do this, press 'Print Screen' or 'PrtScr' on your keyboard. This will automatically store your current screen display. Go to 'Word', click 'Edit' and then 'Paste' – this will then show your screen display as an image – click 'Save'

7. REPORTING & SUPPORT LINKS

CEOPS & Think U Know Reporting sites

https://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/   www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Facebook – Click 'Report' located throughout the site or email **abuse@facebook.com** and use the CEOPS button

Youtube – Click on 'Flag Content as Inappropriate' under the video box. You will need to create an account first, to access this service

Record evidence. If moderators are present on the site, report any inappropriate behaviour or activity.

Games Consoles:

Playstation, **http://www.ps-playsafeonline.com**

Xbox 360, **https://www.xbox.com/en-US/live/abuse/**

Nintendo wii**, http://www.nintendo.com/corp/parents.jsp**

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