

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY	
	Chapter 8: Out-of-Home Services Section 14: Internet Access and Use of Online Photos	
	Effective Date: July 25, 2025	Version: 3

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POLICY OVERVIEW

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) has established rules for internet access, including the use of photos online, regarding children in out-of-home care to protect their confidentiality and safety.

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PROCEDURE

Internet Access

A child in out-of-home care may be permitted internet access outside of an educational setting when they will be appropriately supervised by the resource parent (see Definitions) or residential treatment facility while using technology with internet access (e.g., computer/laptop, cell phone, tablet, gaming console).

Use of Online Photos

A child in out-of-home care may **not** be pictured, described, and/or identified as a foster child (in any fashion by any entity) in public mass media (see Definitions) for any purpose without the consent of the child's parent, guardian, or custodian or the child, if age and developmentally appropriate.

Note: DCS consent is needed if Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) has been granted and all appeals exhausted.

The use of online photos includes, but is not limited to:

1. Recruitment;
2. Resource parent education;
3. Public awareness; and
4. Social networking sites (see Definitions).

Except for extenuating circumstances (e.g., needing to make a report to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children [NCMEC], see policy 5.22 Missing and Runaway Children), DCS will consent to the use of the child's photo and/or description only if the child's parent, guardian, or custodian or the child, if age and developmentally appropriate:

1. Agrees to the requested use of the child's photo and/or description; and
2. Has signed the Authorization to Use and Release Information, Story, Photos, or Video form.

Note: If TPR has been finalized, DCS is responsible for determining that such exposure will not be harmful to the child and will not result in exploitation of the child. Special consideration should be taken into account for youth 18 years of age and older.

The Family Case Manager (FCM) will ensure the resource parent or service provider (e.g., LCPA, residential treatment facility):

1. Has been advised to seek permission by submitting the Authorization to Use and Release Information, Story, Photographs, or Video form to the FCM prior to placing any picture of a child in out-of-home care on any social networking or internet site; and

Note: If approved by the parent, guardian, or custodian or DCS (if TPR has been finalized), the child's identity must be protected by excluding the child's name and ensuring the child's face is covered in social media posts. Identity protection may not be needed if the Authorization to Use and Release Information, Story, Photographs, or Video form states otherwise. Special consideration should be taken into account for youth 18 years of age and older.

2. Understands appropriate supervision of the child when accessing the internet (see Practice Guidance).

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RELEVANT INFORMATION

Definitions

Cyber Bullying

Cyber bullying refers to the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others.

Public Mass Media

Public mass media refers collectively to all media technologies, including the Internet, television, newspapers, YouTube, and the radio which are used for mass communications.

Resource Parent

For the purposes of DCS policy, a resource parent includes a foster parent, licensed and unlicensed relative or kinship caregiver, and a pre-adoptive parent.

Social Networking

Social networking refers to online communities of individuals who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. This may include but is not limited to Facebook, Twitter (X), LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Discord, and TikTok.

Forms and Tools

- [Authorization to Use and Release Information, Story, Photographs, or Video \(SF 55670\)](#)
- [NetSmartz Home](#)
- [Take It Down](#)

Related Policies

- [2.31 Handling and Documenting Suspected Child Sexual Abuse Material](#)

- [5.22 Missing and Runaway Children](#)

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LEGAL REFERENCES

- [IC 5-14-3-10: Classified confidential information; unauthorized disclosure or failure to protect; offense; discipline](#)
- [IC 31-27-4.5-1: Foster parent's right to disclose confidential information; limitations; exceptions](#)

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PRACTICE GUIDANCE- DCS POLICY 8.14

Practice Guidance is designed to assist DCS staff with thoughtful and practical direction on how to effectively integrate tools and social work practice into daily case management in an effort to achieve positive family and child outcomes. Practice Guidance is separate from Policy.

Internet Supervision

Open communication on the use of privacy settings when using the internet and social networking sites helps to protect privacy and maintain confidentiality. Appropriate internet supervision may include, but is not limited to:

1. Using the Child Family Team (CFT) Meeting process to address social networking and internet usage;
2. Checking the history of websites viewed and apps used;
3. Using parental control tools (internet providers may provide guidance);
4. Keeping the computer in a common area of the home;
5. Educating children and caregivers about internet safety. The resources provided by the NetSmartz Home website may be helpful for caregivers;
6. Prohibiting the posting of pictures with a child's identifying information (e.g., names on jerseys, school information, letterman's jackets, or location);
7. Informing the child to advise a trusted adult (e.g., the child's parent, FCM, resource parent, teacher, coach, or church member) if someone makes any kind of contact online that is sexual, unsolicited, or threatening; and

Note: If nude or partially nude photos and/or videos of the child have been posted online, the Take It Down website through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) can provide assistance in removing the images. See policy 2.31 Handling and Documenting Suspected Child Sexual Abuse Material.

8. Emphasizing no tolerance for any type of cyber bullying (see Definitions).

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