

FACEBOOK
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101

*Facebook 101 for
Child Welfare Professionals:*
**AN INTRODUCTION TO
USING FACEBOOK**

.....
to Reach Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families



Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

What is social media?

Social media encompasses a wide range of online networks that connect people. There are many well-established social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) and other new ones being developed and gaining in popularity (e.g. Pinterest, Tumblr, etc.). Although there are some similarities across social media networks, most have distinct functions and styles. For example:

- Facebook is commonly used for more informal, social interaction
- Twitter uses short blurbs of information and brief conversations
- LinkedIn is for professional networking
- Flickr is for sharing photos and blogging
- YouTube is for sharing videos

Many more social media networks exist and tend to ebb and flow in terms of popularity and usage.

How does Facebook differ from other networks?

Facebook offers many features and has functionality that differentiates it from other social media platforms. Understanding these differences can help child welfare agencies assess whether Facebook is an appropriate tool to use as part of your agency's work. Here are just a few of Facebook's features and functionality:

- Facebook gives you the ability to share many different types of information including photos, links, and videos
- There are great ways for those who are following your agency's Facebook page (i.e., "fans") to engage with your agency and with others through the use of comments and "Likes"
- Your agency's Facebook fans can share your agency's posts, creating the possibility of significantly extending the reach of the information your agency distributes on Facebook
- Fans can communicate with your agency through private Facebook messaging

How could my agency use Facebook?

There are many possibilities for how child welfare agencies can use Facebook to support outreach, recruitment, retention, and efforts to communicate with prospective and current parents. For example, agencies could use Facebook to:

- Share information about upcoming foster and adoptive parent recruitment events, orientation sessions, and other events for prospective foster and adoptive parents. *Note: Using Facebook should not replace other ways of sharing this information, but should instead supplement your agency's other outreach efforts.*
- Share information about upcoming awareness-raising events, supplementing your agency's other dissemination and outreach methods
- Feature profiles of children who are waiting to be adopted to help prospective parents learn more about children in foster care who are available for adoption from your agency. *Note: You should only do this with the child caseworker's approval and on a case-by-case basis with appropriate preparation of the child. More information on this strategy can be found in our **Facebook 201** guide.¹*

¹ "Facebook 201 for Child Welfare Professionals: Strategies and Best Practices for Using Facebook to Reach Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families" – available on the AdoptUSKids website at http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/facebook-201-for-child-welfare-professionals.pdf
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- Make it easier for families to find out about the resources your agency has to offer by sharing information and links to resources for foster, adoptive, and kinship families about parenting children with special needs; participating in parent support groups; accessing services and support from the agency; and other information that will be helpful to families
- Provide answers to common questions from prospective foster and adoptive parents—this provides both a service to families currently working with your agency and to prospective parents who see the information as well
- Post success stories about foster, adoptive, and kinship families, and youth who were formerly in foster care, which can help in your recruitment and retention efforts. *Note: You should only do this with permission from the families and youth involved, following best practices for protecting individuals' privacy.*
- Connect with youth who were formerly in foster care, including providing easy ways for youth and young adults to reconnect in an informal way with your agency for support and resources
- Keep in touch with youth who are in independent living arrangements through two-way communication via Facebook's private messages function
- Have an additional opportunity to find out about youth who are in independent living settings or who have aged out of foster care, including getting updated information about their location, living situation, and emerging needs for support, assuming they share this information publicly on Facebook
- Link to commonly needed forms and information for foster, adoptive, and kinship families, including details about foster care, adoption subsidy, or guardianship payments; respite care providers; parent group meetings; and other information that will be helpful to families. *Note: It is becoming more common for people to ask for these kinds of information via Facebook instead of looking on your website or contacting your agency by phone or email.*

How to Request Training and Technical Assistance in Social Media

We offer free training and technical assistance (T/TA) to public child welfare agencies to help you build your agency's capacity to use social media as part of your recruitment and retention efforts. You can access our T/TA services in any of the following ways:

- Connect with us online at adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment
- Contact your Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regional Office staff to initiate a request for T/TA
- Contact us to discuss your needs by calling 303-726-0198

Seek Your Agency's Guidance Before Implementing These Ideas

The guidelines in this document apply equally to both public child welfare staff and the staff of private agencies that provide services on behalf of the public agency.

Child welfare systems across the country are in varied stages of exploring and using social media. The ideas included in this document are general suggestions for ways to use social media in child welfare work and are intended for agency leaders and managers as they decide if and how social media can support their communication, outreach, and engagement efforts. As with all new approaches, you should consider how these suggestions might work within the context of your jurisdiction and your State's public child welfare agency's policies, guidelines, and best practices. The ideas and tips included here should not be used if they conflict with any policies of your State's public child welfare agency, regardless of whether your relationship with the agency is that of employee-employer or contractual, and should only be implemented with the support of the public agency's leadership.



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