

Children and young people's use of the internet: Advice for adoptive parents

Many adopted children and young people encounter negative experiences in childhood. These experiences such as loss, grief and disrupted family lives can make them more vulnerable to risk both online and in the real world.

In the online world, they may be additional vulnerable to the range of risks that all children and young people face. Adopted children also face the possibility of contact from their birth family. This can pose additional risks. Sometimes birth families bypass the traditional route of using an adoption agency to find their relatives and instead use online sites such as Facebook to trace and locate them. Some adopted children also actively search for their birth relatives in secret; where they are successful, this can place them in risky situations.

For a child, finding their birth family when using the traditional channels can be emotional and challenging. Offline this would involve preparation and significant support; however the speed of the internet means online contact can be instant, direct and can happen without anyone knowing.

This contact causes additional complexities; what may start well and feel like a 'honeymoon' period, can quickly spiral out of control. The child could find themselves facing demands from additional relatives looking to make contact. These individuals may have varying accounts of the events leading up to the adoption which could leave the child confused and upset.

As an adoptive parent, it is important that you:

- ***Take an interest in your child's online life.***
Use the internet as a family. Discuss their favourite sites and the "friends" they have in these spaces.
- ***Talk to your child about what they would do if they did hear from a member of their birth family online.***
If the situation does arise having a plan in place means they will be more likely to come to you for support.
- ***Recognise that your child may be curious about their past and the people in it.***
Let them know that you understand their curiosity and that it's ok to talk about it with you. Emphasize that you won't be upset or angry.
- ***Ask your child to set privacy settings on the sites they use online.***
This will ensure that they have more control over their personal information and who can gain access to it. Do the same on the sites you use and be careful what information you and the rest of the family post about your adopted child.
- ***Don't be afraid to seek further support.***
Contact your child's adoption agency if you have any queries about online contact from birth families and if you are concerned that your child may be in danger - call 999.