

Social Media

(Revised 10/22/21)

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Introduction

Social media includes but is not limited to:

- Social networks such as, but not limited to, Instagram ©, TikTok©, MySpace©, Facebook©, Twitter©, YouTube©, Snapchat©, Periscope and LinkedIn®.
- Blogs and Vlogs, including micro blogs such as twitter
- Podcasts
- Networking apps
- Discussion forums
- On-line collaborative information and publishing systems that are accessible to internal and external audiences (e.g., Wikis)
- (Really Simple Syndication) feeds
- Video and photo sharing

Social media can be a powerful tool for communicating with a wide range of people and organizations. CWS strives to stay current with technology; therefore necessary safeguards must be in place. There is a need to manage risks associated with the use of social media. These guidelines and policy apply to private and password protected social media platforms as well as open public platforms.

Policy

All CWS confidentiality constraints must be adhered to on any and all social media sites. Overall County and HHSA information technology policies must also be adhered to. The County has established policies and procedures based on best business practices to support the performance of the County's business and to protect the integrity, security and confidentiality of the County's data/information and information systems. ([See County of San Diego Summary of Policies Regarding County Data/Information and Information Systems](#)).

Online information lasts longer than one may want or intend even if deleted (i.e., it can be cached). All content online becomes immediately searchable and can be immediately shared. This content immediately leaves the contributing individual's control forever.

Under no circumstances will clients' names, images/photos/videos, and/or other personally identifying information be posted or shared on social media, personal video and picture storage sites, or any internet based platform. In addition, County staff are not permitted to participate in social media images or photos with youth.

Policy (cont.)

CWS staff will **not** use Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or any other social media sites or networking apps to communicate directly with clients, or their acquaintances, but may use information obtained in the public site to initiate contact through an alternate medium.

CWS is allowed to view publicly available information on social media sites but cannot initiate direct contact with clients or their acquaintances through social media. CWS staff is not to message, “Friend Request,” or otherwise contact the client and/or their acquaintances. CWS staff are only able to print pictures/information off a client’s social media page that are publicly viewable. This may not be done from an SW’s personal social media account. A work-related account set up should not contain personal or confidential information, the standard/ default privacy controls suffice.

Employees must remember to avoid conflicts of interest as well. This may include an entity offering to pay a CWS staff for participating in an online forum or soliciting endorsement in relation to their position/job. Other County policies such as workplace non-discrimination/harassment, as well as code of conduct, apply to all social media content.

Foster children and social media

Foster children have personal rights (Community Care Licensing Regulations Section 89372 (a)(c) and WIC 16001.9) including the rights to have social contacts with people outside the foster care system. Many foster children may have Facebook or other social media pages about themselves. It is the expectation that the resource parents will monitor the content as part of the Prudent Parent standard (i.e. the way any parent would with their own children). The Prudent Parent Standard (WIC 362.05 and WIC 362.04 (a)(2)) provides guidance for caregivers to make decisions regarding a child’s entitlement to participate in age appropriate social activities.

A resource parent may want to “friend” a child in their care but should exercise caution in doing so. Depending on the circumstances, when a foster child leaves that resource parent’s care it may be wise to “unfriend” that foster child.

SWs should ask the children and teens on their caseload about any social media pages or apps for networking/contacting/sharing locations the child may have or use. It is important that no confidential CWS information is contained on these pages. That would include:

- Foster parent’s confidential addresses or contact information
- Details of allegations of abuse
- Biological parents name and address.

Per Community Care Licensing (CCL) Regulations Section 89372 (a)(c) and WIC 16001.9, foster children have personal rights including to have social contacts with people outside of the foster care system.

Foster children and social media(cont.)

A foster child's use of and access to electronic devices and cyber information is considered a normal and essential social activity. As with the use of cell phones, computers, music players and other personal property, if the usage becomes excessive to where it interferes with school/work obligations or becomes inappropriate or dangerous, a court order can be sought to limit the foster child's use of such media. Legal statutes mandate that a SW may not confiscate a foster child's personal property (including electronic devices and access to social networking web-sites) without a court order. A caregiver has an obligation to monitor a child's access to and use of personal property, including the use and acquisition of apps that disclose the youth's location/whereabouts.

Resource Families/ Parents and social media

Should resource parents have social network pages (e.g., Facebook), it is important that SW's notify resource parents of the constraints of publicly posting foster children information.

Resource parents must not have pictures of foster children posted on any public social media site nor any foster children's names. No personally identifying information about foster children should be on a resource parents' social media page, blog, etc.

Resource parents should receive education on networking apps and social media sites in relation to youth use, should this information be something they have not previously dealt with or been educated on.

SWs and social media

Under no circumstances will a CWS SW "friend" or otherwise link to a CWS client or resource parent on their personal social media pages.

Some contracting staff may have work-related social media pages where they receive information updates from the agencies that they work with. Work-related social media pages will contain no personal information on the CWS staff.

CWS staff are not permitted to access their personal social media pages from work devices during work hours (see Internet Policy), even if they are "fans" or "friends" of work-related agencies/entities, etc. This action would be considered as accessing personal internet use on County time.

SW's should exercise prudence if considering including a client's social media information in any court reports. SW should only gain this information by conducting a public search and not by logging on to their own personal page to access the information. Generally, this information should only be searched when there is a reasonable concern that valuable information is contained there (e.g. a client states that they posted something or expresses concern in seeing something posted).

For any personal social networking sites, SW's must be mindful of the public nature of these sites and therefore the possibility for third parties to collate vast amounts of information. Where CWS staff associates themselves with the County and/or CWS (through providing work details or joining a County network/group) they should act in a manner which does not bring the County and/or CWS into disrepute.

SW's should use caution when posting on their own personal social networking pages. Clients can generally search this information. It is generally wise to protect personal information from public venues.

Blogs

Bloggging is the practice of posting web logs (AKA blogs) to the Internet. It is a medium of self-expression. On their personal time, employees may blog about their work experience.

The expectations and CWS policy are as follows:

- Personal bloggging is not a business-related activity and should be done during personal (non-work) time only.
- CWS sponsored bloggging may only be done after express authorization of Public Relations and management.

In the event that CWS staff participate in personal bloggging, the following applies:

- You are personally responsible for your posts.
- Use a disclaimer such as “This is a personal website, produced in my own time and solely reflecting my personal opinions” in order to differentiate personal identity from business identity.
- You must endure that your bloggging and social networking does not interfere with your work commitments.
- If you publish or post to a blog and it is related to the work you do, or subjects relating to CWS practice, you must make it clear that the views expressed in the blog are solely your personal views and do not necessarily represent the views of CWS or the County. Write in the first person. Where your connection to CWS is apparent or assumed make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of CWS.
- Use a personal address (not your County issued e-mail address) as your primary means of identification.
- Respect copyrights, fair use, and financial disclosure laws.
- Do not disclose confidential or proprietary CWS information. Consult with County Counsel or the PM under Confidentiality - General for guidance about what constitutes confidential information. Under no circumstances will clients’ names or other personally identifying information be posted on a personal blog.
- Do not cite or reference business associates or coworkers without their approval.
- You may not provide a link from your site to the County’s website without express written permission from Public Relations/Management.
- Ask your supervisor/manager if you have any questions about what is appropriate to include in your blog.

If you have questions about these guidelines or any matter related to your site that these guidelines do not address, please direct them to the Compliance Officer, Privacy Officer, Public Relations and/or your supervisor/manager.

Professional use of social media

The use of Facebook, and other such media, by CWS staff to communicate with CWS clients and families presents a unique set of privacy and confidentiality issues. Any Facebook messages sent by CWS staff to either children or parents would be subject to the Public Records Act (PRA), and subject to possible production upon request by any member of the public.

Professional use of social media (cont.)

CWS case and client information is confidential under California Welfare & Institutions Code Sections 10850 and 827. If CWS staff is using Facebook to make contact with families or children, the information is potentially at risk of being disclosed.

Additionally, Facebook might decide that the use of its service by government agencies to create an account for the purpose of contacting persons of interest to CWS might pose a violation of its terms of service.

CWS is allowed to view publicly available information on Facebook pages but cannot initiate direct contact with clients or their acquaintances through Facebook. **CWS staff is not to message, “Friend Request”, or otherwise contact the client and/or their acquaintances through Facebook.** CWS is permitted to print pictures of a client’s Facebook page ONLY when they are publicly viewable pictures.

Some County staff may be asked to participate and engage in internet conversations for work-related purposes in support of organizational objectives. These assignments require approval and must comply with professional standards.

Alignment with SET

This policy supports SET [Value 5](#) and ensuring that all parties have mutual understanding of, and respect for, one another’s roles, the law, and the rights due to children, youth, and families.
