

Appendix R: Guidance for Families Regarding Social Media

The following tips can help families protect children and ensure they are sharing information responsibly during reunification operations.

As reunification efforts take place after an emergency or disaster, social media can be a valuable tool, but it also presents real risks, especially for children. During this sensitive time, it is critical to prioritize safety, emotional well-being, and the protection of personal information.

1. Be Alert for Misinformation

- Rely only on official sources (e.g., government agencies, NCMEC, Red Cross, verified emergency accounts) for updates about reunification centers, shelters, and rescue efforts.
- Do not share or repost unverified information, including names, photos, or rumors about missing children or survivors.
- Help children and teens understand that not everything they read or see online is true, even when it appears urgent or emotional.

2. Guard Personal Information

- Do not post or share the real-time locations of children, families, or reunification centers unless directed by official authorities.
- Avoid sharing:
 - Full names of children
 - Dates of birth
 - School Names
 - Shelter or hotel locations
 - Contact numbers
 - Other identifying details or images
- When communicating about sensitive matters, use private and secure channels such as encrypted messaging apps.

3. Prevent Exploitation or Predatory Contact

- Be cautious of individuals online who offer help, transportation, or accommodation.
- Do not respond to messages from unknown people, even if they claim to be rescuers or “friends”.
- If suspicious contact or requests for personal information occur, report them immediately to authorities or platform moderators.
- Limit posting or sharing reunification photos unless consent is clearly given by all parties involved.

4. Protecting Children’s Emotional Well-Being

Limit Exposure to Disturbing Content

- Do not allow children to scroll unsupervised through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, or X (Twitter), where graphic images and traumatic stories may appear.
- Adults should preview content before sharing updates with children.

- Turn off autoplay and disable notifications on apps that may repeatedly show distressing content.
- Encourage offline activities to reduce stress and provide stability.

Support Emotional Regulation

- Avoid long periods of social media scrolling, which can overwhelm children emotionally.
- Reassure children with clear, calm updates in plain language.
- If a child becomes anxious after using social media, help them identify what upset them and guide them back to safe, regulated content or away from screens entirely.
- Connect children with trained counselors or crisis support if they're showing signs of distress, withdrawal, or fear related to online content.

Watch for Cyberbullying or Harassment

- Children may be targeted online by peers or strangers during vulnerable moments.
- Monitor accounts for signs of bullying, such as:
 - Name-calling or threats
 - Reposts of distressing content
 - Insensitive comments on public updates
 - Encourage children to speak up if they feel unsafe or attacked online. Block and report any abusive users.