

A GUIDE:



# Social media for new & prospective adopters

“I don't know how people manage if they haven't got a support network of adopters”

Cheryl

“There's nothing as important and empowering as being in a room full of people who know what you're going through”

Jenny



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# About this Guide

Welcome. I'm Jai Mackenzie and I'm a senior lecturer at Newman University, Birmingham. This Guide is based on the findings of my work with single and same-sex adoptive parents. Many of these parents reported that other adopters were their primary supporters: a reliable source of advice, a trusted shoulder to cry on, a best friend, or just someone who 'gets it'. Social media was making it easier than ever for them to meet other adopters, to build a supportive network, to find information quickly in times of need, and to stay in touch even when friends are miles apart.

Social media can include networking sites such as Facebook, microblogging sites such as Twitter, photo-sharing apps like Instagram or messaging apps such as WhatsApp or Messenger. They can connect you with people you already know, or help you to find others who have similar experiences or circumstances. This guide briefly introduces the seven most common types of social media that may be useful to new and prospective adopters. Each page explains how the social media type works, how it can help you develop and maintain meaningful relationships with other adopters, and what risks it may present to families' safety, privacy and anonymity. These pages also include testimonies from adoptive parents who regularly use these media.

The guide is not intended to support young people in using social media safely, but to empower you as a parent to use social media in positive ways that may support and enhance your family life. If you're looking for help that focuses on young people, there are other guides in this area, such as this one produced by [Childnet](#), or this by the [NSPCC](#).



I hope you find the Guide useful. Please scan the QR code, or [click here](#) to complete a brief survey to tell us what you think.



# Social Networking Sites

*e.g. Facebook, Twitter*

Social networking sites usually connect their users to many people at once, be that people they already know, groups with shared interests or beliefs, or friends of friends. Adopters are often very careful about what they share on sites like this, because it can be difficult to control who sees your posts, and being on social media can make it easier to search and find you online. Further, many adopters are reluctant to share on social networking sites because they don't want to 'broadcast' the details of their private lives. However, social networking sites can be an excellent way to access more personalised groups (see pages 7 and 8).

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## GOOD FOR:

Reaching out to everyone in your network; updating people; staying in touch.

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## BAD FOR:

Privacy and anonymity (but check privacy setting options); making you easy to find.

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“On my Facebook page, what I post goes out to everybody: I have relatives, friends from the school gate, colleagues and other adopters, all in the same place. For this reason I'm careful about what I share - I want to make sure I'm not sharing too much personal information”

*Anna*



# Microblogging Sites

*e.g. Twitter, Instagram*

Microblogs are a type of social networking site in which people share short posts, videos or collections of images. Sites like Twitter and Instagram encourage users to build a following and share with large networks of people. However, many adopters counteract this public dimension by adjusting their privacy settings, or creating anonymous profiles to preserve their privacy. Twitter has a particularly active adoption community, and can be great for 'finding your people', who you can also connect with in more private spaces. However, Twitter is also a space where groups with oppositional views often collide, and it's worth thinking carefully about whether you want to engage with polarised views on adoption.

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## GOOD FOR:

Accessibility; networking; reaching a wide audience; keeping up with news and policy; advocacy and activism.

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## BAD FOR:

Privacy (but check privacy setting options, and consider setting up an anonymous profile); Twitter is well-known for online controversy, arguments and abuse.

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"When I went on Twitter I discovered this whole new world of adoptive parents sharing their experiences. It's through that networking that I really learned there was anything to learn about parenting adopted children"

*Jenny*



# Photo-sharing Apps

*e.g. Instagram, Flickr, Tumblr, Snapchat*

This sub-set of social networking sites are designed for photo and video sharing, so are better suited to people who prefer pictures to words. Sharing photos of adopted children can be risky, but most photo-sharing sites can be set to private, and some users share photos without ever revealing their children's faces, for example through carefully chosen angles or strategically placed emojis.

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## GOOD FOR:


Visual sharers; staying in touch.

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## BAD FOR:

Privacy and anonymity (but check privacy setting options, and consider setting up an anonymous profile).

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“We have a Tumblr blog which is password accessed, we share all our photos of Lucy with family there because we don't want to put photographs in the public domain”

*Peter*

# Online Support Groups

*e.g. Facebook Groups, WhatsApp Groups*

Online support groups can vary in size, from a small group of known contacts you can count on your fingers, to large groups with thousands of members. In smaller groups people are more likely to share personal, intimate information, whereas larger groups are good for quick access to a wide range of relevant information and experiences. Usually, larger groups will be less secure and private, and the volume of information can be overwhelming for new adopters. 'Secret' groups are the most secure, but they can only be accessed by invitation.

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## GOOD FOR:

Privacy; emotional support and 'venting'; getting a range of perspectives; findings out about others' experiences; building close friendships; connecting with similar families.

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## BAD FOR:

Accessibility (you may need to meet people first before being invited); becoming overwhelmed and 'overly invested' in others' lives; focusing more on negative experiences.

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"I wouldn't ask for words of support on my Facebook page, I wouldn't want to seem too needy. But with my Facebook group, who are a very supportive community, I will do that"

Tony



# Messaging Apps

*e.g. WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram*

If you have an internet connection, messaging apps offer a cheap and easy way to share texts, photos, videos, links and audio messages with individuals and small groups. Messaging groups tend to be private and exclusive; you can usually choose exactly who you want to contact and be confident no-one else will see your communication. WhatsApp is particularly well-known for its security because it encrypts all messages. For this reason, people often share anything and everything – from what they're eating for lunch, to meeting arrangements, to the intimate details of their personal lives.

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## GOOD FOR:

Privacy and security; reaching out to specific people; emotional support and venting.

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## BAD FOR:

Anonymity; meeting new people.

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"I can ask anything in a Messenger group of foster carers and adopters, and because it's our small group of a few people that we absolutely know and trust, we're happy to go into much more detail about our experiences and put up photos of our children"

*Lynne*

# Blogs and Websites

*e.g. Wordpress, Weebly, Wix*

Blogs and websites are sometimes used by adopters to share experiences, advice and information in more detail. For some, writing can be a bit like therapy – a way of getting things off your chest and getting some perspective on your experiences by putting them into words. Blogs don't tend to be as interactive as social networking sites, but many adopters link their blogs with social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and bloggers often build networks of people who share and read each other's work. Even if you don't start your own blog, you might find it useful to follow and read those written by other adopters.

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## GOOD FOR:

Sharing widely; advocacy and activism; long-form writing; telling your story; building a following.

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## BAD FOR:

Privacy and anonymity (but check privacy setting options, and consider setting up an anonymous profile); time commitment, slower feedback than social networking sites.

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"I put my story online because I'm trying to inspire others; my big message to people is that single motherhood is 100% normal"

*Rachael*



# Discussion forums

*e.g. Adoption UK forum, Mumsnet Talk forum*

Discussion forums vary in their size, focus, accessibility and useability. A large forum like Mumsnet has a significant membership and is very easy to access. More specific forums like the one run by Adoption UK will have a smaller membership but are more secure and you will exclusively meet people with similar experiences.

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## GOOD FOR:

Anonymity; getting a range of perspectives; finding out about others' experiences; finding relevant information.

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## BAD FOR:

Accessibility and ease of use – forums tend to be very secure and are a great starting point, but can be a bit 'clunky', and not as well-used as those run by large corporations like Facebook.

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“For the first few months and years it was just me and Keir, I didn't really know any other adopters until I started using the Adoption UK forums. That's where people were advertising meet-ups and overnight camps, and that's where I met everybody else”

*Cheryl*

