

# Adoption and Social Media:



## The Effects of Social Media and the Internet on Child Adoption



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## **Table of Contents:**

- **Introduction – Page 3**
- **Chapter 1: Social Media Is Not Just For College Kids Anymore – Page 4**
- **Chapter 2: Keeping your Children Safe on the Internet – Page 6**
- **Chapter 3: Social Media Privacy Settings – Page 8**
- **Chapter 4: Searching Online for Your Birth family/Child – Page 14**
- **Chapter 5: Performing the Adoption Search Via Social Media – Page 17**
- **Chapter 6: Adding a Social Media Component to an Open/Semi-Open Adoption – Page 19**
- **Chapter 7: Social Media Stories from Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents – Page 22**
- **Conclusion – Page 25**

## **Introduction**

The relationship between a birth family and adoptive family can be confusing at times, rewarding at others, and will be forever evolving. In recent years the Internet and social media have expanded the avenues of communication between a child and their birth family and vice-versa. Email and instant messaging, and more recently Facebook and Twitter, have allowed these relationships to grow and given adoptees more of an opportunity to learn about their background and culture. Social media has also given birth parents a peace of mind that their children are growing up in a loving and caring home.

Social Media and the Internet provide more outlets to those searching for their birth family or child. This E-book will focus on the different ways the Internet and social media have affected relationships between birth families and adoptive families, as well as tips to keeping your children safe on the Internet.

## Chapter 1: Social Media is Not Just for College Kids Anymore

Social Media relationships are often difficult to define; there are close friends, college friends, that guy that asked you out in High School, your co-workers and your family members, along with several other groups. You may not have spoken to some of these people in decades but with one click of the mouse you can probably find out what they're thinking about at this very second.

As of March 2012, Facebook had over 800 million users worldwide, and about 150 million of these users reside in the United States. Access to this vast network of people has impacted nearly everyone and every industry in one way or another.

In 2004 when Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in a Harvard dorm, one of the features that separated Facebook from the pack was exclusivity. In order to join the site, one needed a "Harvard.edu" email address. The social media website eventually expanded to other colleges and by 2006, opened itself up to the public. Because Facebook began as a site specifically for 18-22 year olds, it may still have a stigma of being "for the kids," but statistics show that is not necessarily the case.

According to statistics from the website, Crowd Science, the number of social media users in the United States over the age of 65 grew from 13 percent in 2009 to 33 percent in 2011, which is an increase of 150 percent. The number of users ages 50-64 also had a large jump from 2009-2011, growing from 25 percent of that population to 51 percent. The website also said "83 percent of young adults aged 18-29 use social networking sites."

These statistics show that social media websites in general, not just Facebook, have become popular communication outlets. Websites such as Twitter, Google+, Foursquare and others all have large user-bases. As of March 2012, Twitter had over 140 million users and Google + had over 90 million users.

Facebook and Google+ are both similar websites where users can share photos, videos and status updates from their profiles with friends and the public. Twitter is a bit different as it limits user's updates to 140 characters. Twitter has become the preferred social media outlet for politicians, sport teams and celebrities. FourSquare is a different social media outlet as it relies on users checking in at their locations based on GPS signals. FourSquare allows users to check in at "Adoption STAR on Plaza Drive" and send these updates to Facebook, Twitter, Google + etc. These updates will provide a map of the area where you are located, and FourSquare will also suggest activities and restaurants based on your location.

What do all of these statistics and different social media outlets mean? With so many people of all ages using some form of social media, it is very likely that your child or someone from your child's adoptive family/birth family is using social media, specifically Facebook.

Do you know what your child is doing on the computer and Internet? Are you prepared to respond if a member of your child's birth family "finds" you on social media? What if, as a birth parent, your child or your child's adoptive parents "finds" you? What if a birth family member directly "friends" your child? These are all questions that should be considered and spoken about with loved ones and an adoption counselor.

## Chapter 2: Keeping your child safe on Social Media

Social Media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and others, all have privacy settings that users can manipulate to make their profiles as public or private as they see fit. The next two chapters will look into speaking openly and honestly to your children about the positives and the dangers that the Internet presents, as well as updating privacy settings on all three websites.

There are many classes and workshops available to parents that teach them about the positives and detriments of social media, and prepare them to keep their children safe on the Internet. One proactive tip is to join Facebook and Twitter yourself if you haven't done so already. This way you will know what your kids will and will not be able to do on the social media sites. Also, by being "friends" with your children on social media sites, it may prevent them from publicly posting videos, photos and status updates that may be inappropriate.

It will be difficult to keep your teenage children off of social media sites. Even if you do not allow Facebook, Twitter and similar sites at your house, your kids will most likely have Internet opportunities at school, on their cellphones or at a friend's house. Instead of fighting against joining social media sites, it is often more reasonable to allow children of a certain age to join them, while making them follow strict rules.

These rules can include:

1. That they must be "friends" with you on all of their social media sites, and that they can not block you from viewing any part of their public profile.
2. They must provide you with the email address and password for all of their social media accounts so that you can see any private messages and confirm they have not blocked you from viewing their profile.

Setting Internet and social media usage guidelines for your children is important, it's also important to be a positive role model for your children on the Internet. If your children see you posting inappropriate photos (past or present) or sharing too much information in your status updates, then you are setting a precedent that it is OK for them to do the same. By remaining socially appropriate on your social media page, you are teaching your children what you expect of them.

Being friends with your children on social media, viewing their profiles regularly and being a positive Internet role model is a start to keeping them safe on the Internet. Another important aspect is speaking to them regularly about the dangers of the World Wide Web. It's important to discuss with your children that people may not be who they claim to be online, and to never give out private information like a phone number, address, social security number etc.

When speaking with your children about the dangers of the Internet, try to find ways to connect with them by using age-appropriate examples that they can relate

to. A scene from a movie or an article from a newspaper can provide the starting point for a conversation about the dangers of the Internet. These tangible examples can provide a good opportunity to make an impression with your children.

## Chapter 3: Social Media Privacy Settings

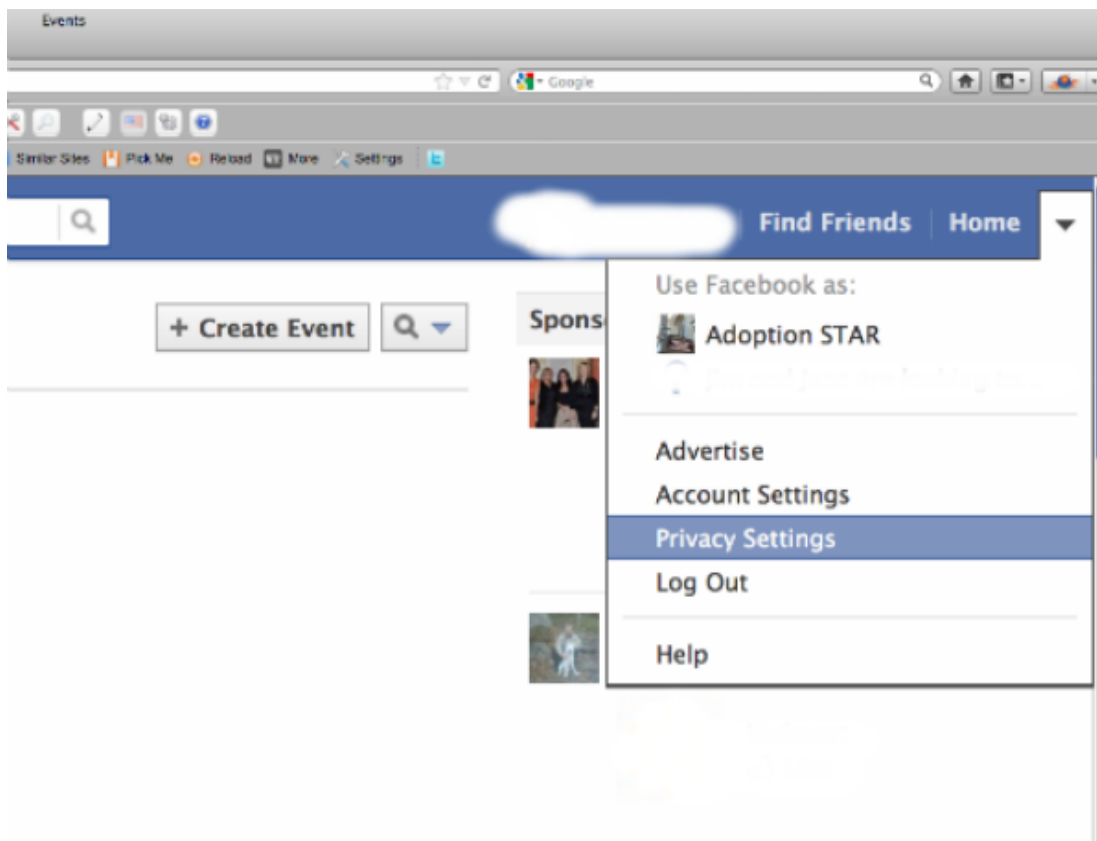
### Facebook:

Facebook's Default privacy settings are set up to make your status updates, photos and videos public; however, there are easy changes you can make to your privacy settings.

### Facebook Privacy Settings

#### After logging into Facebook:

- Click on the upside down triangle in the top right corner right next to the "home tab"
  - Click on the "Privacy Settings" tab from the drop-down menu
- Scroll down on the "Privacy Settings" page and click "Edit Settings" under "How You Connect"



#### At this point you can decide:

- "Who can look up your profile by name or contact information"
  - "Who can send you 'friend requests'"
  - "Who can send you Facebook messages"

Once finished with "How You Connect," you can click on "Timeline and Tagging." Here, you can choose:



- "Who can post on your wall"
- "Who can see wall posts by others on your profile"
- To confirm any post or photo that you are tagged in before it becomes public.

### How You Connect

Who can look up your timeline by name?	<input type="button" value="Friends"/>
Who can look you up using the email address or phone number you provided?	<input type="button" value="Friends"/>
Who can send you friend requests?	<input type="button" value="Everyone"/>
Who can send you Facebook messages?	<input type="button" value="Friends"/>

[Learn more](#)

If you are concerned about your privacy, these settings provide an opportunity to make your profile private, meaning anyone who is not your friend will only be able to see your name and profile picture. Non-Facebook friends will not be able to view your contact info or status updates. This information would only be made public once you have "friended" this person on Facebook. If after becoming "friends" with someone on Facebook, you still do not want them to view your entire profile, you can set custom privacy settings for specific people. This is helpful if you're a birth parent, adoptive parent or adoptee that isn't ready to have a relationship with their birth family/child's adoptive family.

There are other privacy settings that would allow specific people to see only portions of your profile, and this may be an appealing option in the beginning of an online relationship.

Of course these options bring up the realistic scenario that your child will adjust their privacy settings in order to block you (the parent) from certain portions of their profile, or open their profile up to the public. That's why it's important to be proactive and check in on your children's Internet usage.

## Twitter:

Twitter has grown exponentially in recent years and now has over 100 million users. While there may not be as much private information shared on Twitter as there is on Facebook or Google +, there is still the possibility to “over-share” information. For those new to Twitter, it is a social media website that allows people to post short status updates (each post must be 140 characters (letters, spaces etc.) or less.) It has become very a popular outlet to follow celebrities, athletes and politicians, as well as a place to get breaking news.

One way to create anonymity on Twitter is to create an account name or “handle” that is not specific to you (or your child.) For instance, if your child wants to join Twitter and is a Buffalo Bills fan, creating the name “BillsFan256” would allow them to share their thoughts 140 characters at-a-time while not revealing their identity.

The other step you can take to keep yourself private on Twitter is sending out “protected tweets.”

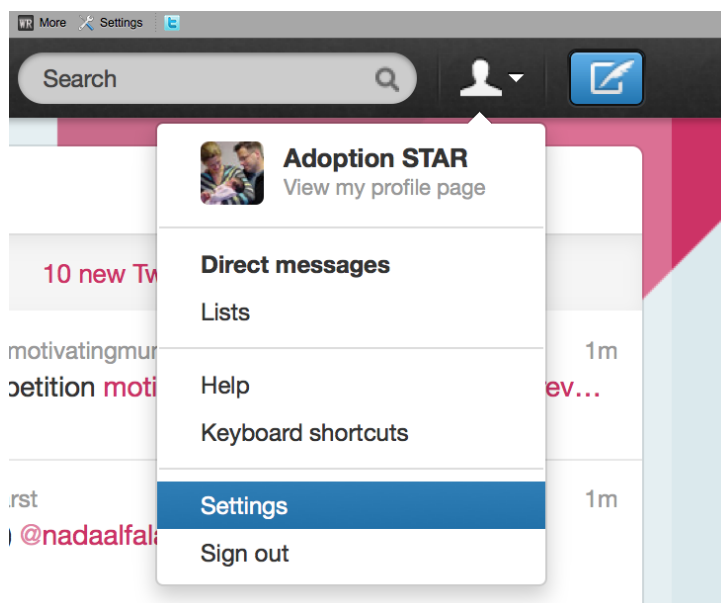
### Making your Tweets “Protected”

According to Twitter, “when you protect your Tweets, the following restrictions are put in place:

- People will have to request to follow you and each follow request will need approval
- Your tweets will only visible to users you approve
- Protected Tweets will not appear in Twitter search
- To read all of the restrictions of Protected Tweets [click here:](#)

### To Make your tweets protected:

- **Click the upside down arrow in the top right corner and click on settings from the drop down menu.**



- **Scroll down the settings page to “Tweet Privacy”**
- **Click the “Protect my Tweets” check box**



- **Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the “save changes” box**

### **Google +**

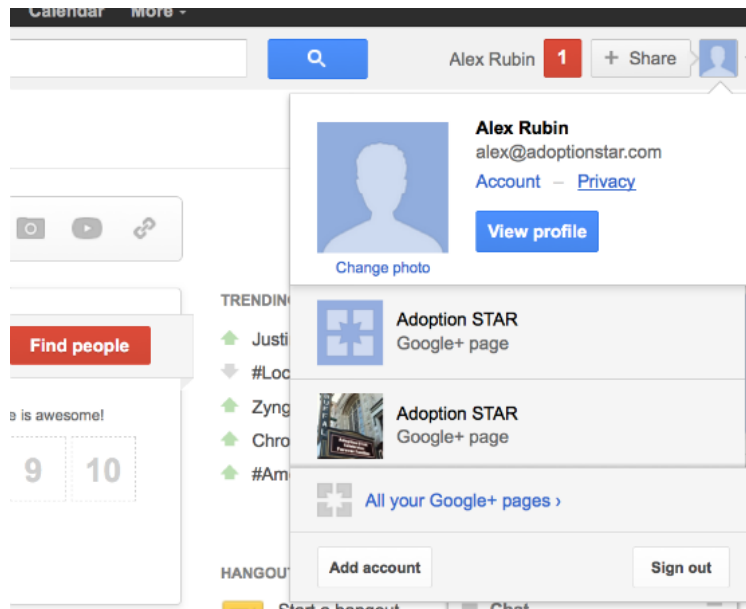
Facebook and Twitter have been part of our society for several years but Google + is the new kid on the block. Google + is similar to Facebook in several ways, as each user is given a personal profile to upload information about themselves, post photos and videos and update their status.

The biggest difference between Google + and Facebook is the ability to easily broadcast different “updates” to different people. Google + calls this “circle management” and allows you to create circles for groups like “book club” “college friends” “family” “Co-workers” etc. Posting to only specific circles allows you to update your “college friends” with information that you don’t want your co-workers and family seeing.

If you are an adoptive parent, Google + gives you the ability to post certain information that only your child’s birth family can see, and also post information that you would be more comfortable if the birth family were not privy to, and vice-versa.

## Google+ Privacy Settings:

In order to adjust privacy settings on Google Plus, you must first click on your name in the top right corner of the page and then click “Privacy” from the dropdown menu.



### You can then click on the “Edit Visibility on Profile” tab:

- Once you have entered this page you can manually add information to many different questions such as “Location” “Education” “Employment” etc. You then have the option of adjusting how and if people can contact you through Google +. You also have the option of leaving these questions blank.

#### Public profile information

You choose what information in your profile you want to make visible to specific individuals, to circles, or to everyone.

[Edit visibility on profile](#)

#### Sharing

##### Circles

Circles are groups of people you share content with. The names of your circles and who you add to them are visible only to you, though you can set whether the list of people in all of your circles is visible in your public profile.

[Manage circles](#)

##### Network Visibility

You can control which people appear on your profile. Note that circle names are never revealed.

[Edit network visibility](#)

Going back to the original privacy page you can also click on “Network Visibility” which allows you to adjust who can see the users is in your “circles” and who has you in their “circles.”

Once again you can go back to the original privacy page and click on “Edit Photo Settings.”

- In this section you can adjust who can comment on your posts
- You can also adjust what you will receive an email notification from Google + for
  - o For example “when someone mentions you in a post” “When someone comments on your photo” “When someone adds you to a circle.” Etc.
- In this section you also have the ability disallow people to download your photos on to their computer.

Once you have the privacy settings set up the way that you like, you can feel comfortable joining the social media universe, however you should always remember, and remind your children, “the Internet is written in ink, not pencil.” Once you’ve posted a status or uploaded a photo or video, there is a possibility that somebody has downloaded or saved that post, keeping it on the Internet super highway forever, long after you’ve deleted said post.

## Chapter 4: Searching online for your birth family/child

*The following sections are written specifically for members of the adoption journey who have a closed adoption. We will discuss social media relationships in open and semi-open adoptions in later chapters.*

*Important terms to know:*

- **Closed Adoption:** *The birth family and the adoptive family have not shared any identifying information with each other and do not communicate with each other, either before or after the adoptive placement.*
- **Search:** *An attempt, usually by birthparent, adopted person or adoptive parent (but sometimes by volunteers or paid consultants) to make a connection between the birth parent and the biological child.*
- **Birth Family:** *Biological (or genetic) parent or family member of the adoptee.*

The previous two sections of the E-Book focused on speaking with your loved ones about the opportunities and dangers of the Internet. Adoption STAR also recommends speaking with your closest friends and family members as well as an experienced adoption counselor before beginning an adoption search or responding to a birth family member's attempt to contact you.

There are many possible adoption search outcomes, and it's important to thoroughly think through each possibility beforehand. There's no way to know how you will feel about each of these possible outcomes, but by talking about your feelings with loved ones and an adoption specialist, you can be better prepared.

If a birth family member contacts you unexpectedly, it's important to take time and process all of the information before responding. If you are contacted via social media it may be necessary to research that the person contacting you is, indeed who they say they are.

The next two sections will be broken down into "Options if a birth family member contacts you online" and "Options if you find a birth family member online."

### **Options if a Birth Family Member Contacts You Online**

It can be a polarizing moment. You log into your social media account and there's a notification that someone wants to be "friends with you." You click the notification and see a name that may or may not be familiar. Maybe there is a message that comes along with this "friendship" request, or maybe you click on the profile for a minute and do some cursory research. Either way you eventually realize that this person who has sent you a friendship request has the possibility of being your birth child/birth family member.

## What next?

It's possible that you've been searching for this person online as well and they happened to find you first, or maybe what you originally thought was a meaningless notification has now become a crossroads moment in your life.

Hopefully when you are contacted, you are at least aware of your place in the adoption journey, and this request does not come as a complete shock. If unfortunately, that is your situation, your next step should be to have an open and honest conversation with whoever will have the most information about your adoption story. It's important to gather information on this person who has contacted you to make sure he/she is who they say they are, and that they have found the right person online, which may be an issue if you have a common name.

If it's not possible to speak with a family member with first-hand information, you may want to ask the person who contacted you for the name of their adoption agency. By contacting the agency you may be able to receive enough information to confirm the adoption story, or the agency may be able to lead you in the right direction to finding answers. Be aware however that the most you may find out is non-identifying information, but that information may confirm what you are looking for.

If you are aware that the person contacting you exists, then you have two major decisions to make:

1. Are you ready to have a relationship with this person?
2. If you are ready to have a relationship, are you comfortable with this relationship being through social media, where they can view information that you'd rather either keep private or share with them in person?

After receiving this social media invitation, you will probably feel a range of several emotions, including: thrilled, shocked, confused and many more. It's best to step away from the computer and think about what the consequences will be of any decision you make regarding this "friendship" request. If there's a family member or friend that you are particularly close to, this is the time to call on them. Don't allow an online request to "rush" you into things. All too often we react with such speed to electronic requests; slow down, Process, identify an adoption professional or an adoption support group to get involved with and process this information with them.

Whether you decide to accept or decline this friendship request, it is best to respond with a personal message. It does not need to be long or in-depth, but if you are accepting the invitation, the message can serve as a good icebreaker. If you would like to have a relationship with this person outside of social media, you can always send a personal message back declining the invitation but inviting them to E-mail and/or telephone you.

E-mail is a great compromise if you're uncomfortable having a social media relationship. By using E-mail you can still have real-time conversations and send photos back and forth without disclosing private information. If you're very concerned about privacy, you can create a new E-mail account that is only used for these conversations.

If you're just not ready to develop a relationship with your birth family, then that short personal message will at least give the recipient the peace of mind that you are thinking of them.

If you are uncomfortable being found via social media then please revisit the previous two sections of this E-Book, which show you how to make your profile private. You can also use the settings to limit how much information one of your social media "friends" sees.

### **Options If You Find a Birth Family Member Online?**

Deciding to begin an adoption search is not something to do lightly. If you are an adoptive parent of an adolescent child, it's important to keep the lines of communication open when it comes to adoption searches. Your child may be searching Facebook or other social media sites in an attempt to connect with their birth family. As a parent you will want to be involved in the search and speak with your child about all of the possible outcomes of an adoption search. It is also a good idea to speak, along with your child, with an adoption expert.

If you're a birth family member who is searching for an adoptee who is still in his/her formative years (under the age of 18), you may want to find a way to contact their adoptive parent first. Adoption STAR recommends that adoptive parents begin discussing adoption with their children from the earliest of ages, however some adoptive parents may not receive or follow this advice. You do not want to assume that the child knows everything about their adoption journey, especially if they are younger.

You also want to be careful if you are an adoptee searching for a birth sibling. You cannot be sure that your birth parents have told their other children about your adoption story. Before contacting them it may be appropriate to reach out to your birth parents, if possible, and at least alert them to the fact that you hope to connect with your birth siblings.



## Chapter 5: Performing the Adoption Search Via Social Media

Performing an adoption search strictly using social media can be the equivalent of looking for a needle in a haystack. In order to improve your chances it is best to gather as much information about the person you're searching for as possible. As an adoptee this process can start by asking your parents if they have any information on your birth parents. If your parents are unable to provide you with the information necessary, you can obtain non-identifying information on your birth parents. Non-Identifying information includes their hair and eye color as well as the city you were born in, their ages, occupations, possibly the circumstances of your birth parents relationship and your conception and birth.

There are also Facebook pages and groups where birth family members and adoptees post information in hopes of finding their birth family.

In any adoption search via social media we recommend including a personal message and not by beginning with a "friend request." This personal message can be as long or short as you choose, but will serve as an icebreaker. The right message may comfort the recipient, who could be going through a range of emotions when your name appears on their profile. Another reason to begin with a message is, in a closed adoption the recipient may have never received identifying information such as a full name, and the message will make things clearer for everyone involved.

To send a message to a person, click on the person's profile and click the message button, which is generally located somewhere near the top right corner. After clicking the message button, type your message in the marked area and click "send." If you do not see a "message" button, this may be because they have elected to not receive messages from "non-Facebook-friends." In this case, you will have a decision to make on whether to accept the friendship in order to send a message.

After putting yourself out there by sending the private message, you may begin to second-guess your decision or worry about the response, and the longer it takes for someone to respond, the more anxious you may begin to feel. In these moments of anxiety, it's important to put yourself in the other person's shoes. As the person sending the message, you had the opportunity to process all of the information and prepare yourself for the next step. The person receiving this request may or may not know about your adoption journey, and even if they do, they may not have a lot of information. It may take time to process this information, and it's important that you give them opportunity to do so.

**What Next?**

When beginning your adoption search and maintaining connections with birth family members, it's important to think about what you hope to get out of the relationships and what you're willing to give. All relationships are non-linear and as you get to know each other and develop a trust you may have different expectations.

Social Media and the Internet have made it easier to perform adoption searches and create connections with birth family members, but what about after the connections are created? The next logical step is having a conversation, whether that is by E-mail, instant message, Skype, phone or other communication outlet is up to the people involved. Having an actual conversation with a birth family member who you have never met may seem intimidating at first, but rest assured that the person on the other end of the conversation is most likely just as anxious as you.

It cannot be reiterated enough, that pre-search counseling is recommended before beginning an adoption search, whether or not the Internet and Social Media is utilized.

## **Chapter 6: Adding a Social Media Component to an Open/Semi-Open Adoption**

The previous sections of the E-Book have focused on searching for birth family members via social media and starting a relationship online after having a closed adoption. The next sections will look into adding a social media component to an already open or semi-open adoption. They will also focus on speaking about social media relationships before an adoption placement and adding the parameters agreed upon to the Post Adoption Contract Agreements (PACA.)

If you currently enjoy an open or semi-open adoption with your birth family/child then you may already have a social media relationship. If so, you may be interested in the following section on maintaining a healthy relationship online. If you have an open or semi-open adoption relationship with your birth family/child, but are not connected on social media, there are many things to think about before sending the initial “friend request.”

To avoid any uncomfortable situations, it is best to speak with your birth family/child in person or via the telephone about having a social media relationship before sending the “friend request.” If everyone decides that they are comfortable with a social media relationship, Facebook, Twitter and Google + all offer privacy controls that allow you to pick and choose what your birth family/child can and cannot see on your profile. To learn more about these privacy settings, please review section one of this E-Book.

### **Pros and Cons to having a Social Media Relationship With Your Birth Family/Child**

#### **Pros**

- Ability to easily communicate
- Easy access to photos and videos to share
- In beginning, speaking over email or social media may be less intimidating then speaking over phone or in person
- Can easily limit the information shared from your profile

#### **Cons**

- If privacy settings are kept at default, your profile may provide information that you would rather keep private or share personally
- Comments about your adoption journey, meant for friends and family, may be uncomfortable for your birth family/child
- Communication via social media may not be as personable as communication over the phone or in-person

## **Adding Social Media To Your PACA**

As part of Adoption STAR's PACA's, we ask that birth family members do not share any pictures or information about the child via social media, or any other public avenue. Birth family members are permitted to share photos and information of the child only through non-public forums.

Adoption STAR encourages birth family members and adoptive family members to speak about social media relationships before placement. It is much easier to make these sometimes-difficult decisions before the placement than afterwards.

### **Some things to talk about are:**

- What social media avenues you are most comfortable connecting with (EG: connecting on Facebook but not Twitter. Or just E-Mail to start.)
- Boundaries on "friending" each other's friends and family members
- Whether you are comfortable commenting on each other's public status updates, photos and videos

Before agreeing to be friends on social media, think about how you will feel if you see your child's birth family/adoptive family post about their happiness or struggles regarding the adoption. In order to give everyone their privacy online, some families have created specific profiles for the adoption, where birth families and adoptive families can communicate and share photos and videos without encroaching on each others' privacy.

While Adoption STAR supports and encourages online communication, social media relationships are not legally enforceable under the New York Domestic Relations Law, so it is important to have other forms of communication that are not dependent on social media.

### **Tips To Having a Healthy Ongoing Social Media Relationship**

If you are "friends" with your birth family/child on social media, it's important to re-think how you update your profile. This may mean going through any of your photos and videos and removing, or making private, anything that may make you uncomfortable. This is a good tip for anyone, but it is especially important for those looking to foster new relationships with birth family members. You don't want anyone forming ideas of who you are based on status updates and photos from your youth. Facebook's addition of the "Timeline" to your profile makes adjusting old posts even more important. The Facebook Timeline takes your photos, videos and status updates from the time you started Facebook until today and posts them on your profile page in chronological order. It is very easy to remove anything from the timeline that you would like; it's just a matter of taking the time to do so.

**To remove any content from your Facebook timeline:**

- Scroll down the timeline to the offending piece of content that you'd like removed
- Drag your mouse over the content and click on the pencil that appears in the top right corner
- To delete from Facebook click "Delete" or "Remove Tag" from the drop-down menu
- To keep the content on Facebook, but remove it from the public timeline, click "Hide from Timeline" on the drop-down menu.

Some of these photos and videos may provide great memories, and there are ways to remove them from your profile while still keeping "hard copies." Facebook allows you to "download" your photos and videos, and by downloading them to the hard drive of your computer, you can then remove any "embarrassing" photo and video from public consumption while still keeping them privately on your computer.

With newer adoptions, you will want to be careful about how much you share about your adoption on social media, especially if the adoption has not been finalized yet. Adoption STAR requests that during a match with expectant parents, prospective adoptive parents do not post about the match, the birth family or post any photos of the child prior to placement.

It is important to think about who will be reading your social media updates and how they may react. Perhaps you can look at social media updates as a test of self-control, and before you make any post, think about the possible repercussions. This is even more important when it comes to sensitive issues such as adoption.

## Chapter 7: Stories From Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents

There is a lot of information on keeping your children safe on the Internet and having social media relationships with your child/birth family/child's birth family, throughout this E-Book, and it's important to remember you are not alone on your adoption journey. This next section will introduce an adoptive mother (Sue) and a birth mother (Erin) and they will explain how they have personally used the Internet and social media to create a healthy open adoption relationship.

### Sue's Story:

Sue and her husband have adopted three children. Her two youngest children are biological siblings and the family has a beautiful open adoption with the children's birth mother and extended family. Sue is "Facebook friends" with her youngest children's birth mother, grandparents and cousins, however she said this is not always the best decision in all situations.

"Once you add someone, it's really hard to take them off (Facebook) without problems," Sue said. "Don't add them unless everyone's certain it will be a positive experience on both ends."

Sue said that they do not use any privacy settings in their social media relationship and have never had a problem. She also said that her friends and family members know to be just as respectful and appropriate regarding adoption on their Facebook page, as they would be in off-line conversations.

"I don't think we had to have that conversation with our friends and family," Sue said. "Everyone who knows us knows we have a great relationship with our children's birth parents and always use positive adoption language."

Sue and her husband utilize Facebook to remain in contact with the birth family through wall posts and direct messages, and they also share videos and photos on the site. Sue said her children's birthdays are coming up, and they'll post videos of them opening gifts from their birth family onto Facebook for everyone to see.

While there are many positives to having a social media relationship with your child's birth family, that doesn't mean it doesn't come with certain challenges. Sue said that she thinks it's hard sometimes for the birth family because it's a constant reminder every time they log onto Facebook.

"They want to see and enjoy seeing (their children grow up) but it's also hard to watch," Sue said.

Sue's family doesn't have as open an adoption with their oldest daughter's birth mother. However, they did utilize the social media site MySpace, to begin contact with their daughter's birth father.

"I was trying to find another relative of mine, and I thought why don't I put his name in?" Sue said. "When I did everything (in his profile) matched (our records.) We sent him a letter when our child was four-years-old and just said who we were and how to contact us, and he did right away."

Sue said they have visited each other several times and update each other at least once a year. Having contact has also allowed them to obtain additional medical records.

Sue said neither she or anyone else in her family have had problems with privacy on Facebook and feels that social media has improved their relationship with their children's birth families.

Sue stated, "I've always felt that if someone were to trust me with their child, how could I not trust them with my identifying information."

### **Erin's Story:**

Erin is a birth mother who made an adoption plan for her child. She also has a son living with her. One of Erin's biggest requirements when considering prospective adoptive families was that they be comfortable with an open adoption. She wanted herself and her son to remain in her child's life.

Erin's daughter was born in 2010 and she has a beautiful relationship with her child's family through visits and E-mail. Erin said that she and her daughter's adoptive parents use Gmail to correspond with each other regularly, and also use its photo sharing capabilities.

"In the beginning we talked about (social media) together and decided what would be the most comfortable for everyone," Erin said. Erin and her daughter's adoptive parents decided that E-Mail and in-person visits were better forms of communication for them at this time.

The two families don't just talk about adoption. Erin said they regularly discuss day-to-day life and how everyone in the family is doing. She said that the E-mail conversations are like any other she would have with a friend.

The E-mail accounts are also a great way for the extended family's to stay in contact. Erin said that her daughter's grandmother also sends E-mails to Erin's son, who lives with her.

"I like E-mail, and if you check regularly it gives great communication. It allows it to not be too personal, like Facebook," Erin said. "I like the picture album on Gmail because we can both add pictures, and it's less formal then trying to go through the agency."

The two families have spoken about becoming Facebook friends or creating private Facebook pages specifically for the adoption, but Erin said that for now E-mail is working the best.



## Conclusion

Whether you are an adoptee, birth family member or adoptive family member, the key to a successful adoption journey is being open and honest. There will be times throughout your life when you will have questions or will need someone to speak to, and it is important at these times that you speak with your loved ones as well as an adoption expert.

Social media is a great tool and allows for easy communication in open and semi-open adoptions; However, it is important to not use social media as a crutch. It is difficult to understand tone of language over the computer, which can cause miscommunication. If possible, it's important to pick up the phone and speak to each other on occasion, in order to strengthen any relationship. It's also beneficial, when appropriate, to have periodic visits. Social media should be used for sharing photos and videos and communicating in between phone calls and visits, but by no means should it be the *only* avenue of communication.

If you are embarking on an adoption search using social media, make sure you have spoken with your loved ones as well as an adoption expert. It's important to think about all of the possible outcomes of the search ahead of time, in order to prepare yourself for what you may find.

Because of the opportunity to discover private information, it is important to keep track of the way your children use social media and the Internet. Insist on always knowing your child's E-Mail address and password and periodically check on their Internet activities when necessary. You are responsible for your child's safety; so don't take for granted that they know of all of the dangers that exist on the Internet. Have regular talks with them and use real-world examples to help them understand that people online may not always be who they claim to be.

*If you have any questions regarding the Internet's effect on child adoption, or keeping your children safe online, please contact the Adoption STAR agency by email at [info@adoptionstar.com](mailto:info@adoptionstar.com), or toll-free at 1(866)691-3300. You can also visit our website at [www.adoptionstar.com](http://www.adoptionstar.com) and follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/adoptstar](http://www.facebook.com/adoptstar).*

*Adoption STAR is a not-for-profit adoption agency with offices in New York, Ohio and Florida*