Health and Welfare Alert

Staying Safe on Social Media and Online

The Internet Connects Everyone

Because of the internet's accessibility, people with developmental disabilities need to be mindful of how others might use the internet's capabilities to steal from or harass them. Direct support professionals and families can help keep people safe using these tips.

Protecting Information

Discuss how to be safe online with the people you support. Do not give out personal information (address, bank account information, date of birth, or Social Security or Medicaid numbers) to people you don't know.

- Banks should already have personal information and do not need to ask for it.
- If someone wants to purchase something online, ensure their payment information never gets saved to someone else's or a public computer.

Risks of Social Media

Cyberbulling is abuse by people who use technology to send or post messages, pictures, or videos that hurt or embarrass another person. Delete, block, or "unfriend" people who are mean online.

Scams and fraud are common online. If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is. Be aware of scams like someone asking for bank account information because they want to give away lottery winnings, or when people ask for gift cards to help them get out of financial trouble. People also might say they will be a person's girlfriend or boyfriend in exchange for money.

Online Responsibilities

Everyone who uses the internet has certain personal responsibilities to ensure their own safety. Make sure the person understands that anyone can see information they post on social media and they shouldn't post anything that would be embarrassing for others to see. The person's boss or future employer, family members, and friends can see what they post. Ask the person to take a few minutes before they share something to think about how it might make them feel if it were said about them.

Ensure the person doesn't post pictures or personal information about other people without their permission. If someone asks to have a post about them removed, delete it. Providers and county boards of developmental disabilities should consider having a policy that outlines what their staff can share on social media about people with disabilities who they support.

Support the person to keep copies of messages that make them feel sad, scared, or uncomfortable. They should reach out to someone they trust for help.

Remind people to not post sexual pictures of themselves or others online or send such photos to others via text messages. Don't continue to send a lot of messages to someone who doesn't respond.

Help the person log out of online accounts when finished, and protect their passwords by making sure they are in a safe place if written down.

The internet can be a wonderful place to meet new people and share interests. Make sure the person uses reputable sites, such as websites for self-advocacy, where they can talk to others. Be aware that not everyone online is honest. Remind people they shouldn't meet face to face with an online acquaintance alone.