Appendix VII: Computer Use and Internet Safety

Computer use and the internet are a part of everyday life and required by schools for research and homework. Laws and ethics surrounding computer and internet use vary from culture to culture and family to family. YFU USA hopes that the following guidelines can serve as a foundation for open discussion between host families and students. These ongoing discussions about appropriate computer use can prevent misuse throughout the exchange experience and keep the student and host family safe from the dangers of cyberspace.

- Many students will arrive with their own personal computer. They will be expected to follow host family rules on usage. Any rules should be communicated clearly to the student.
- Use of the host family computer or access to the internet is not a right. Students should be prepared for no access in the host family home or limited access at the host family home, at school, or at a public library.
- If granted permission to use the host family computer, the student must always respect the needs of others and set time limits, ask permission before adding programs, downloading materials from the internet, or opening email attachments.
- As excessive computer use has been shown to have a negative impact on host family relationships and overall adjustment, host families and YFU have the right to limit or suspend computer use.
- Nothing on the internet is private, including blogs, personal web pages, and social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Everything posted on the internet can be viewed by any person at any time.
- Any file stored on the host family computer is not considered private. Students should not store anything on the host family computer that they would not wish to be viewed by host family members.
- Be aware of the danger of internet predators. Predators can become a threat when a student communicates with strangers over the internet. Never reveal personal information, such as school name, hometown, contact information, or pictures. Never agree to meet someone in person who you met in an internet chat room.
- Do not use violent, offensive, sexually suggestive photos, screen names, or language on the internet. These can result in the student being asked to leave their host family and/or school placement. In such cases, YFU may need to recommend an early return to the home country.
- Pictures or videos depicting nudity or sexual acts must never be viewed, downloaded, or sent over the internet. This is a serious crime in the US that can result in the student being arrested, charged with internet pornography, and sentenced to jail. Do not open such files sent by friends.

Recommendations to the Host Family

- Host parents are encouraged to discuss safe ways to use the internet with their students.
- Host parents or school personnel may choose to monitor their student's personal web pages and other internet use. Although such monitoring is common and legal in the US (if the activity is on a host family or school computer), it might be considered an invasion of privacy in many cultures. YFU requests that host parents always notify the student before checking computer activity.
- A student's own laptop computer is private property, and YFU host families and representatives can ask a student to surrender the laptop if a condition of probation for overuse, however, no such persons are permitted to violate student privacy by examining personal records or correspondence.

Please don't hesitate to contact the YFU National Office at 1.202.774.5200 with questions or concerns regarding this policy. Additional resources for parents and teens on this topic can be found at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website: missingkids.org.

Appendix VIII: Social Networking Safety Tips

Having a Snapchat or other social networking site profile (Instagram, X, Tiktok, etc.) is a good way to make plans with American friends and to keep in touch after going back to your home country. By following a few simple safety tips, you can very easily avoid creating problems for yourself and others.

Social media platforms are public

The way you present yourself and your friends on your social media platforms can be seen by hundreds of people that you know and care about. Every time that you post something, decide whether you are representing yourself, your home country, family, YFU and host family well. Every year a few students lose their host family because of what they have posted on Facebook. Don't let this happen!!

"Friend" your host parents, host siblings and Local Coordinator

It's a great way to help everyone communicate better. Many YFU fields have closed group pages on Facebook. Be sure to join your group to share your experience with others and stay informed about what is happening in your area.

Limit activity with your home country

Excessive communication with friends and family at home makes it harder to settle into the USA. If this becomes a problem for you, YFU and your host family will ask you to limit your time on your social media platforms.

Post pictures from your American life

It's fun for others to see what you are doing and you will have a nice photo album to look back on when your exchange year is over.

Keep your profiles private

Viewable only by people you know! You do not want to share your phone number, address or email with everyone who has internet access! You can set these limitations in your privacy settings.

Delete inappropriate comments from friends

It's OK to delete things you are embarrassed about or that you would not be proud of later in life. If a friend tags you, you can delete tags or yourself in any pictures that you don't want others to see. Even if your profile is private, your photos can be accessed publicly if you have been "tagged". Again, every year a few students lose their host family because of an inappropriate photo or post from their friends. Don't let this happen!!

Don't harass or threaten others

Passing along rumors or unkind jokes or stories, or even false stories about someone on social networking sites is called cyber-bullying. Don't complain about your host school, friends, or host family members on Facebook. Be sure to tell a host parent, teacher or YFU representative if you become the target of cyber-bullying.

Join YFU groups and other groups associated with your interests

This will help you learn about American culture. But don't join groups that might offend or embarrass yourself, your host family or your own parents.

Universities and employers are looking at social media platforms

Keep in mind that all information and pictures that you post of yourself and your friends can become part of a school or job application later in life, and are part of your YFU application now!

YFU staff and volunteers will be viewing your social media platforms

Any information contained in your social media platforms or posted about you by others that involves a violation of your host family's trust or YFU rules may result in disciplinary action up to and including being sent home.

Don't friend anyone you don't know personally

It's not rude to ignore friend requests from strangers. Have fun and stay safe!

Appendix IX: Social Media Use While On Program

While social media is a part of daily life, YFU is an immersive, in-person experience. Being present and engaged in your host environment is essential. If social media use becomes disruptive, YFU or your Host Family may implement limits on phone or internet usage. Adhering to your Host Family's house rules and school policies on phone usage is a key expectation.

Your online actions reflect on you and YFU. Always remember that what you post online can have real-world consequences. You are accountable for your words, actions, and posts, whether positive or negative.

Tips for Safe Social Media Use

Share concerns

If something happens online that makes you uncomfortable or unsafe, speak to a trusted adult immediately.

Protect privacy

Keep your personal information and that of others secure. Avoid using others' accounts or phones without permission.

Avoid harmful content

Don't spread rumors, offensive jokes, or hurtful stories. What seems like a joke can be deeply hurtful to others.

Think before posting

Once a photo, message, or video is shared, it's difficult to control its spread. Don't post when angry or upset.

Report harmful content

Use social media platforms' reporting features for inappropriate content and block users if needed.

Use privacy settings

Ensure only those you trust can see your posts and personal information.

Be cautious

When accepting friend requests, check mutual connections and verify identities.
Don't feel obligated to accept random requests.
Trust your instincts: If something feels wrong online, talk to someone you trust for advice.

Signs of Unhealthy Social Media Usage

- Disrupts daily responsibilities (school, work, friendships)
- Chosen over in-person interactions.
- Prevents getting at least 8 hours of sleep.
- Reduces time spent on physical activity.
- Continued use despite a desire to stop.
- Cravings to check social media frequently.
- Engaging in deceptive behavior to stay online.

If you feel threatened or uncomfortable online, YFU is here to assist:

- Host Family: Your primary point of contact and support.
- Local Coordinator (LC): If your Host Family cannot help, contact your LC. They can escalate concerns to your Community Manager (CM) or Student Support Manager (SSM) if needed.
- YFU Emergency Line: Available 24/7 at 1.800.424.3691 for urgent issues.

Additionally, school counselors, teachers, or coaches can offer support. While you're encouraged to communicate with your Natural Parents, it's recommended to first work through local YFU support to avoid unnecessary stress.

- YFU is committed to your safety and well-being—don't hesitate to reach out for help