

What Parents Should Know in Order to Protect their Kids Online

The Risks Associated with Sharing Photos of Your Children on Public Social Media Platforms

Abstract

Sharing kids' photos on public social media, known as "sharenting," carries significant privacy and safety risks like identity theft, cyberbullying, and exploitation, as images are permanent and beyond parental control once posted, potentially harming a child's future self-image and autonomy.

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for the



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WHY YOU SHOULDN'T SHARE PHOTOS OF YOUR KIDS ON PUBLIC SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

PUBLIC SOCIAL MEDIA

- Public social media refers to online platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, and Reddit where users share content (text, photos, videos) intended for broad public access, forming digital communities and spaces for information sharing, professional networking (LinkedIn), entertainment (YouTube, TikTok), and public discourse, with varying degrees of openness and governance.
- These platforms allow general access and engagement, contrasting with private groups, and have become significant in shaping public opinion and communication.

RATIONALE

- In 2026, experts and child safety organizations increasingly advise against posting photos of children online—a practice often called "sharenting"—due to the long-term risks to their privacy, safety, and digital identity.

KEY REASONS FOR AVOIDING THIS PRACTICE INCLUDE:

LOSS OF CONTROL AND OWNERSHIP:

- Once a photo is uploaded to a social media platform, the user often grants the platform a license to use, distribute, or even sell that content to third parties. Even if you delete the post later, the data may remain in archives or have been saved by others via screenshots.

AI EXPLOITATION AND DEEPFAKES:

- As of 2026, generative AI can easily "scrape" publicly available photos to create realistic [deepfakes](#) or nonconsensual imagery. Some AI companies use online photos of children as training data for facial recognition without parental knowledge.

IDENTITY THEFT AND FRAUD:

- Seemingly harmless photos often reveal sensitive information like a child's full name, birth date, or home location via [metadata](#) or background details (e.g., street signs or school uniforms). This data can be used for "digital kidnapping"—where strangers impersonate children—or to commit financial identity theft by opening fraudulent lines of credit in a minor's name.

PREDATORY BEHAVIOR:

- Predators often scour social media for images of children. Even innocent-looking photos can be misused or shared on harmful forums. Approximately 50% of photos shared on such sites were originally posted online by parents themselves.

INFRINGEMENT OF FUTURE AUTONOMY:

- Children are born with a right to privacy that they cannot yet defend. Posting their milestones creates a permanent [digital footprint](#) they might later find embarrassing or that could negatively impact their college admissions or job prospects.

INABILITY TO PROVIDE CONSENT:

- Most experts agree that infants and young children are incapable of giving informed consent to their image being shared globally. In some countries, like France and Italy, children may even have the legal right to sue parents for violating their privacy through sharenting.

SHARENTING: WHY POSTING PHOTOS OF YOUR KIDS ONLINE MIGHT BE RISKY

- <https://www.expressvpn.com/blog/6-reasons-you-shouldnt-post-photos-of-your-kids-online/#:~:text=Well%2C%20such%20geographic%20markers%20can,of%20physical%20harm%20or%20kidnapping.>

1. YOUR CHILD'S PHOTOS ARE NO LONGER IN YOUR CONTROL

- You took the photo. You posted it on social media. It belongs to you, right? Well, it's not that simple.
- When you post a picture to most social media sites, while you remain the owner of that image (the copyright holder), you are granting the social media company a license to use it and even to allow others to use it. This license generally lasts until you delete the photo from your account.
- Let's say you post a photo of you and your toddler paddling at the beach. An advertiser can take this image—sold to them by the social media site you uploaded the photo to—and use it to promote their products or services, all without asking your permission.
- However, while social platforms can in theory use your photos for all kinds of things, they probably won't. The license you grant them is mainly to allow them to host the photo on their site and apply adjustments to it for different display styles. Nonetheless, it is creepy that they can have so much power over your kids' images.

2. YOUR CHILD MIGHT BECOME A VICTIM OF IDENTITY FRAUD

- It's a proud moment when your child starts school. You snap a picture of your child smiling outside the school gates to celebrate their big day, before posting the photo on Facebook for the rest of the family. The name of the school is visible in the background. Seems harmless, right?
- Well, such geographic markers can be used to track where your child lives, plays, and goes to school. If you do share photos of your kids online, avoid including such information. In fact, it's good to avoid any personal identifying information in pictures and posts of your child. Names, dates, and places of birth should be avoided. Be sure to crop out or obscure such information, as identity thieves can use it to steal your child's identity.
- That's right. Even children can become targets of identity theft. If you notice bills or credit cards arriving at your home in your child's name, chances are they've fallen victim to identity fraud. One recent study found that more than 1.25 million children **fell victim** to identity theft and fraud in a year.
- If your child becomes a victim of identity fraud and you're in the U.S., alert the three major credit bureaus—Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion. They'll send you a credit report and freeze your child's credit to protect them against future fraud.

3. THE RISKS OF PHYSICAL HARM OR KIDNAPPING

- We don't like thinking about it, but broadcasting your children's faces, interests, and frequented locations on social media could put them at risk of physical harm or kidnapping.
- In Japan, police recently reported a disturbing statistic: in 2021, **86 children were kidnapped** in the country using social media, up from 11 in the previous year. In the U.S., the FBI has **raised alarm bells** about abductions facilitated by social media use. The FBI's concerns mainly surround kids' own social media interactions—but parents would be wise to keep their children's lives private for this safety reason, too.

4. IT PUTS YOUR CHILD AT RISK OF 'DIGITAL KIDNAPPING'

- In 2015, mommy blogger Lindsey Paris clicked to see who had recently liked her Facebook page and **discovered** a photo of her then-18-month-old toddler staring back at her. A stranger, who turned out to be a 16-year-old, was pretending Paris's baby was her own; the child had become a victim of digital kidnapping.
- Digital kidnapping is when someone takes an image of a child from social media and gives them a new name and identity. Often, this person will claim the child as their own. They might create entire fake families.
- Then there are those who use the stolen images to engage in baby role-play. Described as the **"the creepiest new corner of Instagram,"** baby role-play involves people stealing photos of babies or young children and pretending to feed or play with them. Some even role-play as the child, answering questions posed by other Instagram users in the voice of the child.
- For example, if a user asks the fake child, "Do you like pasta?" the account would reply, "Me wuve pasta." There are also more malicious scenarios, such as the fake child role-playing as being "nakey" or worse.

5. YOUR CHILD CANNOT CONSENT TO WHAT YOU POST ABOUT THEM

- If someone posts a photo of you online, you can reach out to them and ask them to remove it. If you find the photo defamatory, you could even take legal action. However, it's rare for children to be asked if they feel comfortable with others—parents included—posting photos or videos of them online. Does your 5-year-old really want you to upload that video of them throwing a tantrum or doing something silly? Plus, kids who are very young—say, infants—have no way of consenting.
- In fact, some countries see posting photos without consent as such a violation that they've instituted legal consequences. In France, if you post a picture of your child and they later object, you could be fined up to 45,000 euros or even face jail time. Italy also has similar laws.

6. SHARENTING COULD NEGATIVELY AFFECT YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE

- Remember those photos you posted to Facebook in high school? Unless you deleted them or your Facebook profile, they're still online, ready and waiting for someone to find them.
- You might be ashamed of some of them. Others might affect your ability to get a job. Yes, recruiters will stalk your social media profiles during the interview process.
- Now think of your kids. Those embarrassing videos of them you uploaded. They could affect your child's future in similar ways. Bullies could find the photos and use them as fodder against your child. College and job recruiters could make judgments about your child from the photos you've posted.