

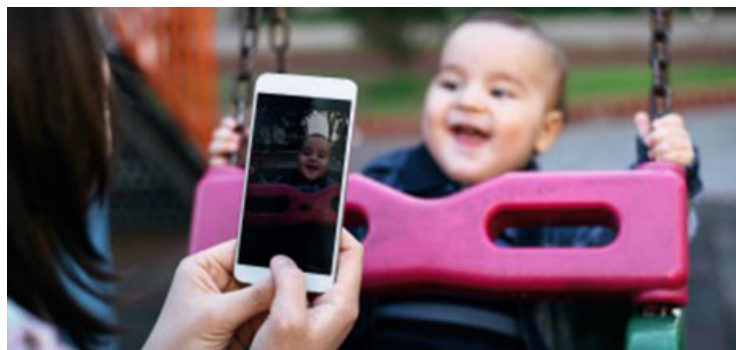


Sharenting: 5 Questions to Ask Before You Post

By: Claire McCarthy, MD, FAAP

If there's anything parents like to do, it's talk about their children—and show pictures of them. This is normal. It's good. It's about love, pride and building community.

But with the explosion of social media, those funny stories—or cute pictures and videos—that you used to share with just your family, your officemates or the other parents at the playground can now be shared with literally the entire world. Millions of them are being shared, every day.



Most of the time, sharing isn't a big deal. But sometimes, it is.

The DaddyOfFive saga (<http://people.com/crime/controversial-daddyofive-youtube-parents-lose-custody-of-2-children-featured-in-prank-videos/>)—in which a couple shared "pranking" videos of their children that bordered on child abuse, and ended up losing custody of two of their children—is an extreme example of how "sharenting" can go terribly wrong. But even though it is an extreme example, it's a cautionary tale about how what seems like a good idea at the time can end up being a bad idea, for all sorts of reasons.

Nothing online is completely private, and everything is permanent.

You can use privacy settings, and you absolutely should, but there are always ways around them (such as screen shots)—and even when you take something down, that doesn't mean it's completely gone.

Ultimately, it's not your information; it belongs to your children.

This second point is particularly important in this new digital age, where all of us have a "digital footprint." A quick Google search can bring up all sorts of information about a person. It's one thing if you are an adult and have chosen to post or share content about yourself—or have done things knowing they could be shared online. It's entirely another if you had no say in it whatsoever—especially when the content might be embarrassing, or worse. Think of it this way: your child has a right to privacy.

I've been writing about my children for years in magazine and online columns, and so I've thought about this a lot. I've been careful not to write about things that would embarrass my children, and as soon as they were old enough, I gave them editing rights (both for themselves and for their younger siblings). I may not have got it perfectly (I remember one child being bummed about a magazine reference to the fact that she took a long time to potty train), but I've been conscious of their right to choose what becomes public about them.

5 Questions Parents Should Ask Themselves Before Sharing Anything About their Children:

- **Why are you sharing it?** This is probably the most important question to ask, as it's not your information, it's your child's. You should have a good reason before you send content out into the world. Get in the habit of asking it of yourself before you post.
- **Would you want someone to share it about you?** This isn't always the perfect barometer, as you might be an extrovert who is happy to share and your child might grow up to be an introvert who likes to be private...but if you would be bummed if your parent shared a picture of you naked on a potty, maybe you shouldn't share the same picture of your child. If your child is old enough to ask, ask them.
- **Could your child be embarrassed by it, now or in the future?** Granted, it's part of the parental job description to embarrass our children. But it's one thing to tell an embarrassing story or show an embarrassing picture to a girlfriend or grandmother—and it's another thing to send the information out to the world. That's not in our job description. That's just mean.
- **Is there anyone in the universe who shouldn't see this about your child, now or at any point in the future?** If the answer is yes, don't share it. I know that sounds extreme, but it's growing more common for employers, college admission staff or possible romantic interests among others to do Internet searches about people. If what you are thinking of posting could come back to bite your child in any way ever, don't do it. And as a corollary...
- **Is this something you want to be part of your child's digital footprint?** Even if it's not embarrassing, how does it paint your child? Think about it. You'd probably like your child to come across as smart, well-behaved, industrious, kind and successful, right? Does what you are posting help that—or hinder it?

It's a good idea to talk with your partner, to be sure you are on the same page (my husband always has editing rights too when I write about our children). It's also a good idea to discuss it as a family once your children are old enough to understand. It's a great opportunity to not just set family ground rules (after all, your children might share about you or their siblings) but also to talk about being good digital citizens.

Because ultimately, that's what this is about: being thoughtful, careful, and kind.

Additional Information & Resources:

- Parents of Young Children: Put Down Your Smartphones (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Parents-of-Young-Children-Put-Down-Your-Smartphones.aspx)
- How to Connect with Your Teen about Smart & Safe Media Use (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Points-to-Make-With-Your-Teen-About-Media.aspx)
- Talking About Sexting with Your Children (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/the-new-problem-of-sexing.aspx)
- Parents on Social Media: Likes and Dislikes of Sharenting (http://mottnpch.org/sites/default/files/documents/031615_sharenting_0.pdf) (C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health)
- Parental Sharing on the Internet: Child Privacy in the Age of Social Media and the Pediatrician's Role (<http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2613405?resultClick=1>) (Article published in *JAMA Pediatrics*)

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