

Sharenting and security concerns: Will you be posting that back-to-school photo?

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Kids' online safety, privacy and what to consider before you post.



Carey van Vlaanderen, CEO of Eset Southern Africa

Sharing that cute photo of your kid's first day at school may have harmless intentions, but there are downsides to sharing too much information about your little ones online, says Carey van Vlaanderen, CEO of award-winning cybersecurity company [Eset Southern Africa](#).

"It may be hard to imagine now, but there was a time before social media. Before smartphones, and certainly before Facebook and Instagram were founded, parents would lovingly capture snapshots of their children, print the most adorable ones, and curate them into albums destined for the coffee table," says van Vlaanderen.

Fast forward to 2023, and billions of social media users worldwide, connecting with friends and family and sharing updates in the form of photos and videos is now possible in a matter of seconds. "Improvements in technology and the rising popularity of social media have made it easier than ever for parents to record and share every precious milestone of their kids' lives, from the first ultrasound scan to the first day of school," she says. However, 'sharenting' – the relatively new term to describe parents sharing the details of their

children's lives online can have potential drawbacks.

Safety first

It is only natural that we want to share the happiest moments of our lives with those we love and connect with daily. "But just as we tell our children not to speak to strangers, it's important to keep in mind that by its very nature, the online world is filled with people we don't know. A first-day-of-school photo contains quite a lot of personal information, including your child's school, their age, and even their teacher's name," notes van Vlaanderen.

If you're comfortable posting photos and videos of your kids on social media, consider the nature of the content you're sharing and double-check your privacy settings. Most parents are wise to the fact that online predators exist and avoid sharing images of their kids splashing in the bath. Van Vlaanderen says thankfully there's a growing awareness that such photos can be screenshotted or downloaded and sent to anyone, if not properly protected. "A good rule of thumb is, if there is the slightest doubt in your mind about a photo, it's probably better not to post it. Another is, to try and imagine how you'd feel if what you're posting about your child were about you instead," she says.

Your child's digital footprint

The first generation of children born in the Facebook era is already in their early 20s, and it is estimated that children born today will have the biggest digital footprint in history. Thinking about the downsides and the potential benefits of this new reality, is helpful for people with children and even those without kids, including employers, recruiters, and educators.

"When you signed up to use your favourite social media platforms, you agreed to those platforms' terms and conditions. It's worth bearing in mind that when you post a picture on social platforms, that image is no longer exclusively yours," explains

van Vlaanderen. That's because the Ts and Cs often state that the moment an image is uploaded onto their server, they are free to use it without consent. While you retain the copyright to the image, the platform whose servers host the image owns the license. "In other words, the social platform is allowed to use your picture in any way they see fit. In addition, social platforms are not responsible for stripping your images of metadata. This data may include your location, the type of device used to take the photo and so on."

Van Vlaanderen says that for the vast majority of people, the choice to create a social media profile and share accordingly has been entirely their own. A toddler today may never even glance at a screen, but still have a social media presence. "Realising your children will inherit the consequences of your online choices, both positive and negative, is worth reflecting on. Your baby will grow into a toddler, then a child, a teen, and finally an adult. They may not give a second thought to a picture you shared of them mid-tantrum when they were four years old, but they could also find it deeply embarrassing, or worse, a betrayal of their trust and privacy," she says.

Identity and self-image

According to a [BBC report](#), estimates suggest that by 2030, sharing by parents could lead to identity fraud that could cost billions per year in damages. The report noted that parents who share the lives of their children online are often 'lulled into a false sense of security,' as information including names, ages, dates of birth, and home and school locations, are vulnerable to being misused to hack passwords or for identity fraud scams.

"Aside from the potential harm of identity theft, posting about every single moment of your child's life may reinforce less than healthy digital habits and create a perception that sharing information online, in whatever context, is safe and harmless. Every picture uploaded, and every update shared also contributes to the construction of an online image that your child will inherit, and depending on your child, may make them self-conscious of what other people think of them or have the effect of them learning to value online validation over real-world experiences and connections," says van Vlaanderen.

We all want our kids to grow up to use social media and online spaces safely and responsibly, to understand the potential dangers while also enjoying the fun side of it. "Does any of this mean we shouldn't share our proudest parenting moments online, or give up social media altogether? That's a personal choice every parent has to make based on what works best for them and their family – but we can all be smarter about what we share and how we share it," she adds.

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