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*Sharenting Without Shame:
A Parents' Guide to Sharing
Images & Videos Online*



What is 'sharenting'?

Sharenting is parents' use of social media or blogs to share content (photos and/or videos) of their children, such as baby pictures or details of their children's activities, accomplishments and/or 'failings'.

What the (limited) research tells us about sharenting-

// Mothers post the most images and videos of their children online¹.

// Fathers are more restrictive about sharing images of their children to broad and professional audiences and are concerned about sharing content that could be perceived as 'sexually suggestive'².



MANY CHILDREN ARE POSTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN THE FIRST DAY OF THEIR LIVES AND ABOUT 92% OF 2-YEAR-OLDS HAVE AN ONLINE PRESENCE³.



PARENTS ON FACEBOOK ARE ESPECIALLY AVID USERS: 75% LOG ON DAILY, INCLUDING 51% WHO DO SO SEVERAL TIMES A DAY⁴.



70% OF PARENTS "SAID THEY USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO GET ADVICE FROM OTHER MORE EXPERIENCED PARENTS AND 62% SAID IT HELPED THEM WORRY LESS⁵.



COMMONLY POSTED TOPICS INCLUDE HOW TO GET CHILDREN TO SLEEP (28%), NUTRITION AND EATING (26%), DISCIPLINE (19%), DAYCARE/ PRESCHOOL (17%) AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS (13%)⁶.



45% OF MOTHERS WHO USE SOCIAL MEDIA "STRONGLY AGREE" THAT THEY GET SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, COMPARED WITH JUST 22% OF FATHERS⁷.



31% OF PARENTS WHO USE SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE POSED PARENTING QUESTIONS TO THEIR ONLINE NETWORKS IN THE LAST 30 DAYS. MOTHERS AND FATHERS ARE EQUALLY LIKELY TO DO SO⁸.



12% OF ALL PARENTS OF CHILDREN UNDER 18 SAY THEY HAVE EVER FELT UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT SOMETHING POSTED ABOUT THEIR CHILD ON SOCIAL MEDIA BY A SPOUSE, FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND⁹.



75% OF PARENTS POINT TO "OVERSHARENTING" BY ANOTHER PARENT¹⁰.

¹https://yardi.people.si.umich.edu/pubs/Schoenebeck_ManagingChildrensIdentities15.pdf

²https://yardi.people.si.umich.edu/pubs/Schoenebeck_ManagingChildrensIdentities15.pdf

³<https://mediaethicsinitiative.org/files.wordpress.com/2018/11/31-sharenting-case-study.pdf>

⁴<https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/07/16/parents-and-social-media/>

⁵<https://www.mottchildren.org/media/32651>

⁶<https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/07/16/parents-and-social-media/>

⁷<https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/07/16/parents-and-social-media/>

⁸<https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/07/16/parents-and-social-media/>

⁹<https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/07/16/parents-and-social-media/>

¹⁰<https://mottpoll.org/reports-surveys/parents-social-media-likes-and-dislikes-sharenting>

Why do we 'sharent'?

// HANKERING CONNECTION- one of our most basic psychological drivers is the need for connection. As humans, we're hard-wired for relationships and posting on social media caters for this psychological need.

// CRAVING EXTERNAL VALIDATION- many parenting tasks are thankless and monotonous, if we're really honest. If we share our parenting milestones, challenges and rewards online we're likely to receive praise and commendation from other parents (in a way that our kids would rarely do). Some parents also use social media to 'prove' they're a good parent.

// PARENTAL PRIDE- pride is a social expectation associated with parenting. We often want to share our children's accomplishments with our friends and family and social media is an easy way to do this. Some people refer to this as the 'humblebrag'. As parents, we also need to remember that just as we share our kids' 'highlight reel' online so too do our friends and family. This can cause the 'compare and despair' phenomenon where parents feel like they're 'failing' because their kids aren't accomplishing the same things that other people's children are doing, according to their parents' social media posts.

// FOMM- we know many teenagers suffer from FOMO (fear of missing out), but I wonder if parents/caregivers suffer from FOMM (fear of making memories.) Is it a real memory if it hasn't been digitally-archived on my camera roll and shared on social media?

// OFFER AND RECEIVE ADVICE- a 2015 study by Pew Research Center found that parents use social media to both give and receive a high level of support via their social networks.

// DIGITAL NARCISSISM- some parents engage in the 'humblebrag'. This is described as, "An ostensibly modest or self-deprecating statement whose actual purpose is to draw attention to something of which one is proud."



Pitfalls-

The Internet is like Vegas- what happens on the Internet stays on the Internet. The Internet never forgets, so we need to be very mindful about what we post about our children online.

// PRIVACY CONCERNS- the risks of children's images being digitally doctored, catalogued on pedophiles' websites or used in other inappropriate ways is of real concern if we elect to share. We lose full control of where our child's image may end up when we share it online and when it may resurface or how it can be possibly manipulated. Aric Sigman agrees that we should be concerned: "Part of the way a child forms their identity involves having private information about themselves that remains private. That is being eroded by social media. I think the idea of not differentiating between public and private is a very dangerous one.

// YOUR PHOTOS CAN BE REPURPOSED BY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS (& IT'S NOT ILLEGAL)- in the Terms and Conditions on social media sites it stipulates that the social media platform has the right to copy and use your photos and videos without requesting your consent. Review these terms carefully before deciding if/what to post of your children.

// SAFETY RISKS- There are valid concerns that social media and blog postings could be used to identify a child's home, childcare/school or play location. In particular circumstances, such as child custody disputes or domestic violence cases, disclosure of identifying information could pose a significant risk, or compromise the validity of a case.

// YOU'RE CURATING YOUR CHILD'S DIGITAL DNA- That cute beach photo, or the toddler babble may seem cute to you now, but your child may not feel that way when their teenage peers, or a prospective employer is viewing the content. Adults have a responsibility and a moral obligation to think carefully about their child's digital footprint.

// BOUNDARY TURBULENCE- not all families have the same concerns or values when it comes to sharing images/ videos of children online. Tensions can arise when content is shared online that isn't congruent with either the child/ teen's needs or values.



// CYBER-BULLYING RISKS- parenting is a topic that is very contentious at times and people often have very different philosophical views and approaches (just think about the whole vaccination debate and breastfeeding topics to name just a few). Sharing your parenting decisions and approaches online can leave you open to (sometimes unkind) public scrutiny. What is shared on social media is only a brief snapshot in time, but many people see it as the 'full picture' and can make premature judgements based on one single post. If you are going to share images/videos of your children online, do so knowing full well that you may be susceptible to other parents' (and non-parents) judgement.

// SOURCE OF CONFLICT- there are anecdotal reports of children and teens reporting images and videos that their parents have posted of them online. I've had children telling me, firsthand, of some of the embarrassing things that their parents have posted on them online, resulting in awkward offline incidents with their peers.

// MISCONSTRUED MESSAGES- one of the chief downsides of online communication is that the emotional nuances we use in spoken conversations simply aren't available. We can't use body language and facial expressions to complement our written word on social media. For example, parents may document that their child's conception as a 'surprise' (albeit a pleasing one) on a social media platform, but a child reading this via a public social media post may find this very upsetting.

// DIGITAL KIDNAPPING- this is when an online stranger takes children's photos from their parent's social media posts and shares them as the stranger's own children. Whilst copying and posting the pictures that others publically share isn't technically illegal, it poses a range of moral, ethical and safety issues.

// INACCURATE, UNSAFE OR UNHELPFUL ADVICE- one of the main benefits of sharenting is that parents can have access to just-in-time advice and tips from other parents. However, this can also be a problem if inaccurate, unsafe or unhelpful advice is shared. This is particularly the case for parents seeking medical or psychological advice online.



Benefits-

There are also a range of benefits to sharing our parenting journey online. Sharenting allows parents and carers:

// EASY DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONAL MEDIA AND FAMILY MILESTONES- many families like being able to quickly and easily disseminate images and videos of their children to friends and family using social media and/or blogs. Posting a photo on social media is an easy way to share their children's achievements and milestones with those who couldn't be there.

// SOCIAL CONNECTION- sharing your parenting experiences online provides a natural opportunity for connection and interaction. As previously mentioned, as humans one of our fundamental psychological drivers is the need for relational connection and social media meets this basic need. Parents can relate to other parents' experiences and share insights and tips in an authentic way via social media. Social media can act like a digital village for parents. A study from CS Mott Children's Hospital found that parents reported that the biggest benefit from sharing on social media was not feeling alone and having just-in-time advice from other parents about parenting dilemmas they were facing.

// SUPPORT- many parents of children with serious medical conditions or additional needs find social media an incredible source of support. Parents are no longer bound by physical boundaries and distance and can connect with other families experiencing similar challenges and have a level of support and connection, not previously possible. Parents report seeking advice about naps, nutrition, behaviour on social media.

//REALISTIC DEPICTION OF PARENTING- many parent bloggers and social media influencers are using their platform to 'normalise' and depict a realistic interpretation of parenting. Some parents claim that viewing other parents' '#keepingitreal social media posts keeps them sane and connected and is therefore good for their wellbeing.



Sharenting Respectfully & Responsibly-

“Manage your family’s digital disclosure by having firm boundaries that are communicated to all stakeholders.”

Documenting our kids’ lives online has become a social norm. How can we continue to do this, if it’s something we as a family elect to do (and that in itself is a personal question), in safe and responsible ways? Here are some general rules of thumb:

// ESTABLISH A FAMILY POLICY- determine your parental disclosure parameters, which describes what you’ll share about your children online. Negotiate your posting preferences with your partner and other active care-givers in your children’s lives. Ensure you don’t succumb to ‘boundary turbulence’ by having explicit rules about social media sharing. Have explicit conversations with your partner, other primary care-givers (such as grandparents) about what types of images/videos that are okay (and not okay) to post of your children. Is it okay to tag you or your children in posts?

// MANAGE DIGITAL DISCLOSURE BY EXTENDED FAMILY AND OTHER CARE-GIVERS- have explicit conversations with other family members or people who care for your children about your social media policy. If you do this upfront, it can prevent the chances that you’ll need to have a difficult conversation later on.

// PAUSE BEFORE YOU POST- Kids can certainly be frustrating and embarrassing as times, but recording and then sharing those moments invades their privacy. I’m not suggesting that posting one funny picture of your child on Facebook will psychologically damage them, but what’s the cumulative effect when they look back at their childhood and realise what was curated and shared and commented on by others. **Glennon Doyle** in her book *Love Warrior* suggested that we “share from your scars not your open wounds.” When we post from our wounds we often regret it later on. Also, ask yourself does this moment really need to be catalogued? What are the sacred, personal and private moments that you want to savour? Does the online world really need to know about every one of your child’s milestones?





“Post from your scars not your wounds”- Glennon Doyle

// PERMISSION TO POST? If your child is old enough to understand, always ask them if it’s okay to post an image before you post it on social media or share it online. Involve your child/teen in taking and sharing images can help them to learn about online etiquette and respectful and responsible online behaviour. Clearly articulate why you’re taking the photo/video and why, where and with whom you’d like to share it.

// PERMISSION TO POST YOUR PEERS’ KIDS- We also need to develop the habit of asking permission to post pictures of other people’s children. Many parents feel defeated or even angry when they find images of their children on social media, when they’ve made a concerted effort to not share images of their children. So always ask permission if you’re posting images of other people’s children. In some instances, there may be a court order in place that prohibits the publication of children’s photos online.

// POLICE YOUR PRIVACY SETTINGS- Whilst many parents employ privacy settings on social media to control who can see their personal information, they are sometimes not well understood by all users. To further complicate matters, privacy policies of social media platforms can change, which may re-classify certain types of information, so what is shared privately today is not necessarily guaranteed to be private in the future. Ongoing vigilance monitoring your privacy settings is vital. TIP- set a reminder on your phone to check your social media privacy settings each month.

// RESPECT THEIR PRIVACY- if your child/teen asks you to remove a social media or blog post, do so immediately and apologise. Ask them to clarify why they didn’t want it shared and assure them that you won’t post without their permission again.

// START THE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THEIR DIGITAL DNA EARLY- have conversations about what kids post online from a young age. Encourage kids to differentiate between posting ‘personal’ and ‘private’ information online. (See the “Sharenting Resource Sheet’ for some a suggested video that explains this in more detail.)



// HAVE ONGOING CONVERSATIONS- parents need to have ongoing conversations about kids' digital reputation. This is not a one-off chat.

// UPSKILL- know who to contact and the steps to follow if you want to remove images/videos from social media. Firstly, ask the person who posted it to remove it. If they don't, or you don't know the person who posted it, go to the [eSafety website](#).

// BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU DISCLOSE- be mindful of your meta-data and geolocation data from your photos and videos. Most digital photos have time, date and GPS coordinates of where the photo was taken attached to the photo in the meta-data. Whilst most social media platforms automatically hide or remove this data be mindful that this is not always the case. Check your location settings on your device to know which apps utilise the geo-location data and turn them off or restrict their functionality if you don't want this data being shared.

// LOOK FOR OTHER SHARING ALTERNATIVES- Do you necessarily need to use social media to share your children's photos? There are other ways of sharing your photos of your kids without relying on social media. For example, [Tiny Beans](#) allows parents to share digital photos easily and privately via an app. It's been described as an online photo journal. You could also use email, a secure online portal (that is password protected and requires authorisation to access) or even use multimedia messaging (SMS or WhatsApp) to share pictures with loved ones.

Managing Oversharing of Your Children-

// ASK FOR CONTENT TO BE REMOVED- if you know the person or organisation (school or sporting club) directly, ask them to remove the photo or video. Organisations should have clear policies about the types of photos and/or videos that can be posted online and the processes for parental consent.

// REPORT THE IMAGE TO SOCIAL MEDIA SITE- If they refuse, or you're unsure as to who posted it, report the content to the site or social media platform on which it was posted. The eSafety Commission has a wonderful tool to enable parents to quickly report offensive or inappropriate material on apps and social media platforms. The [eSafety Guide](#) is a great place to start.





Get Social with Dr Kristy



 FACEBOOK

 INSTAGRAM

 LINKED IN

 WEBSITE

Dr Kristy Goodwin is a digital wellbeing and performance speaker, researcher, author and media commentator (and mum, who regularly deals with her own kids' techno-tantrums). Kristy translates the science and research about how technology is impacting children, teens' and adults' health, wellbeing and performance into practical advice and realistic tips. Kristy's on a mission to help us tame our tech habits, without suggesting we abstain from using technology. You can find out more about how she helps parents navigate the digital world without the grief, guilt and guesswork at www.drkristygoodwin.com, or you can find answers to your digital dilemmas at <https://drkristygoodwin.com/switched-on-parents-portal/>.



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