# KEEPING KIDS SAFE:
# The downside to "sharenting" on social media

*This fact sheet is adapted in part from a 2018 Michigan State University Extension News article by Kylie Rymanowicz called "Sharenting: The Downside to Posting About Your Children on Social Media."

Social media can help friends and family who are scattered across the globe connect with each other. It can also help people feel less isolated when things get tough. But all of that connectedness has a potential downside that many parents, in particular, haven't considered.

Sharenting, which is a combination of the words parenting and sharing, is a relatively new term used to describe parents sharing photographs, videos, and information about their children on social media. While sharing cute photos and videos of your child can be a great way to connect, this sharing carries with it a variety of concerns and risks. We talk a lot about concerns related to youth media usage (AAP Council on Communications & Media, 2016), but there aren't any hard-and-fast rules to guide parents in using social media about or with their children.

## WHY SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED?

Why be concerned about sharenting? According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016), there are definite risks associated with posting about your child online. When parents post about their children on social media:

› **They often don't give their children a say about what they share**. Parents give children choices about all sorts of things. To empower and protect children, they teach their children about taking ownership of their bodies by letting them decide whether they want to kiss or hug relatives; about body safety and the concept of good touches and bad touches; and to respect other people's privacy by knocking and waiting for a response before entering a room. But if parents post about their children without the children's consent, they're not respecting the children's sense of body ownership, their privacy, or their opinions.

› **They have no control over what happens to the posted material.** Once something is posted on social media, it belongs to the world. The poster can't control who has access to it or how someone else might use it. Even when a parent locks down their profile to limit access to a select few, they can't control what those people do with their posts. Many parents have learned the hard way about digital kidnapping, the term for when an internet user steals and posts a photo of a child on social media, claiming that the child is their own (Haelle, 2016).

› **There are very real safety concerns.** When a parent posts specific information about their child online (such as the child's full name, age, where they go to school or to child care) they're running the risk that someone could use that information to gain access to the child. Innocent photos and videos have also been hijacked and posted on pornographic and other unsavory sites. Studies have shown that the "up next" algorithms for sites such as YouTube push innocent content featuring children to users who have been watching sexually explicit content (Fisher & Taub, 2019; Jee, 2019).

**To contact an expert in your area, visit msue.anr.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)**

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROECT YOUR CHILD

The following list of guidelines for posting about your child is adapted from a 2017 article by Keith and Steinberg:

1. Read and consider the implications of the privacy policies of the social media platforms you're using.

2. Use a search engine notification feature (such as Google Alerts) to watch for appearances of your child's name in search engines.

3. Think twice about sharing negative information (such as your child's struggles or parenting struggles you're having with your child) on social media. At the very least, consider sharing it anonymously.

4. Limit the information you share about your child. Don't share their full name, the school they attend, community groups they are a part of, their class schedule, or their location.

5. Give your children the power and choice to control (as appropriate) what you and other people share about them.

6. Before you post, take the time to think about how the post might affect your child in the future

## REFERENCES & RESOURCES

# References

AAP Council on Communications & Media. (2016). Media and young minds. *Pediatrics, 138*(5):e20162591. doi:10.1542/peds.2016-2591

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2016). *Researchers caution about potential harms of parents' online posts about children.* Retrieved from https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/researchers-caution-about-potential-harms-of-parents-online-posts-about-children.aspx

Fisher, M., & Taub, A. (2019, June 3). The interpreter: On YouTube's digital playground, an open gate for pedophiles. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/

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Keith, B. E., & Steinberg, S. (2017). Parental sharing on the Internet: Child privacy in the age of social media and the pediatrician's role. *JAMA Pediatrics, 171*(5), 413–414. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.5059

Rymanowicz, K. (2018). *Sharenting: The downside to posting about your children on social media.* Retrieved from https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/sharenting-the-downside-to-posting-about-your-children-on-social-media

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# Resources

To find out more about keeping kids safe, check out these other MSU Extension resources:

**Keeping Kids Safe series—**These MSU Extension fact sheets are designed for parents and adults who work with kids from birth to age 17. The fact sheets cover issues related to body ownership, boundaries, and safety; consent; identifying and communicating about feelings; monitoring and limiting technology use; and sharing about kids on social media. There are currently four titles in the series:

Keeping Kids Safe: Ages 0 to 5

Keeping Kids Safe: Ages 6 to 11

Keeping Kids Safe: Ages 12 to 17

Keeping Kids Safe: The Downside to "Sharenting" on Social Media

Should you force your child to hug a relative?—This MSU Extension News article offers tips for helping children say goodbye without forcing them to hug or kiss relatives.

These resources also contain helpful information on keeping kids safe:

American Academy of Pediatrics. (n.d.). *Family media plan.* Retrieved from https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2019). *Media and children communication toolkit.* Retrieved from https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Pages/Media-and-Children.aspx

Darkness to Light. (n.d.). *Resources.* Retrieved from https://www.d2l.org/resources/Darkness to Light: https://www.d2l.org/resources/

McCarthy, C. (2017). *Sharenting: 5 questions to ask before you post.* Retrieved from https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Sharenting-5-Questions-to-Ask-Before-You-Post.aspx