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## EXPERT COMMENT: Should I post photos of my children online? Here's what new parents need to know about sharenting

Many of us share life updates on social media, but should we be sharing photos of our children online? In an article written for *The Conversation*, Claire Bessant, Associate Professor in Law at Northumbria University, discusses the potential implications of “sharenting”.

Over 40% of [UK parents](#) put photos or videos of their children online. Showing just how prevalent online sharing now is, in June 2022 the word “sharenting” entered the [Oxford English Dictionary](#), meaning when a parent shares news, images and videos of their children on social media.

Parents engage in sharenting for [many reasons](#): because they're proud of their children and want to tell family and friends about their children's milestones and daily lives; to seek support from and offer advice to other parents; and to store memories. It can also be a source of income. Influencers may [earn substantial amounts](#) from brand partnerships when sharing their family lives online.

Decisions about whether, where, and how much to share pose a [dilemma for many parents](#). [New parents](#) may find themselves confronted by an [uncomfortable paradox](#): they know sharenting may have implications for their children's privacy, but find social media to be an important source of [support and connection](#) to other first-time parents.

Some parents may feel they have no real choice. Increasingly parents are [encouraged into sharenting](#) by third parties. This includes family, friends, [schools](#), community, [the media](#), and [big brands](#).

More research is still needed to confirm exactly how sharenting impacts upon children and their privacy. However, sharenting does appear to pose some risks. Some parents have [stopped sharenting](#) after discovering their children's photos [have become the target](#) of predators.

Researchers have also discovered that it is [relatively easy](#) for third parties to obtain photographs, names and birth dates of children through parents' Facebook and Instagram posts and to link this information with other online and offline sources to create detailed profiles. New parents considering posting a birth announcement on social media should keep in mind that sharing this information may expose their child to the risk of [identity fraud](#).

Many popular social media providers collect and [share information with each other](#). Sharented information [can be collected](#) by other companies, [who monetise](#) this information, profiling children and their families, using their interests and likes to target marketing.

### **What to bear in mind**

There are ways to make sharing on social media more secure. You can turn off geotagging on your smartphone's camera app so location data does not attach to photos. Another option is to review [privacy settings](#) and to limit who can see your posts. On Instagram, for example, by default, adult accounts are set to public. Set your account to private if you want your information to be available only to your followers.

Alternatively, consider using one of the many [private social networks](#), designed for families who don't want to share information beyond a select group of people.

Children's images and information are increasingly shared not just by parents, but also by [family members](#), friends and [schools](#). New parents may find it helpful to think about how they want their children to be portrayed on social media and to have conversations with friends and family about how their children's information will be shared online before their child's birth. This may avoid [conflict at a later stage](#).

It's also worth thinking about the impact your posts might have in the future. Babies and toddlers can't tell you what they think about your posts – so as

their [privacy steward](#) you need to consider how your posts might affect them.

When you share your children's information online you are creating your child's [digital identity](#), a [digital footprint](#) which will follow your child their entire lives.

Consider whether your child will want friends or [future employers to see](#) the information you shared of them as a baby. When teenagers start to [develop their own identity](#) they may become [particularly concerned](#) about their privacy, and about how the way they are portrayed online may affect their friendships and relationships.

Avoid information that is [over-revealing or private](#), or that might upset or [embarrass your child](#) in the future, such as potty training, tantrums, nude or semi-clothed images, and images that children might consider make them [look unattractive](#).

## **The children in the pictures**

Some research has been carried out to investigate what young people think of sharenting. Some say it can be positive, if they're [portrayed well](#) and the content supports a positive [online image or identity](#). Some children say their parents' posts make them feel [happy and proud](#), while others like that it can help them [connect with extended family](#). One child of a parent who [blogged online](#) about her family said it can be "pretty cool... like having a big family of people who've been watching me grow up."

Some children, however, suggest sharenting may cause [embarrassment and anxiety](#). Many want their [parents to ask](#) for [their permission](#) before posting. Even one who did not think that sharenting had a negative impact on them said that it can mean "[a different type of growing up](#)" and is not something they would do as parents.

Once you feel your child is old enough to express a view, speak to them. Finding out what your child does and doesn't want you to post can avoid [irritation, frustration, misunderstandings and conflict](#).

Explain who you want to share information with and why. The [NSPCC's family online agreement](#), which prompts parents and children to agree a strategy

before posting information online, could be used to start conversations about sharenting from an early age.

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