

Young Children and Digital Footprints

- **Think long term.**

Posting photos of your kids creates a digital footprint — a kind of electronic paper trail — that forms your kids' identities in a world they haven't chosen to enter. Someday your preschoolers will grow up, and they might not want documentation of their diaper days hanging out online for their friends to find! Once you post a photo online, you lose control over it. Someone could easily copy the photo, tag it, screenshot it, save it, or otherwise use it — and you might never know. Do a quick mental exercise before you share: Imagine how your child might react to the photo in 5, 10, 15, then 50 years. One of the most exciting aspects about parenting young kids is that the possibilities are endless; they can literally become anyone or anything. Make sure you're not sharing something that could limit the possibilities for them in the future, or which they might resent in the future. While sharing is fun in the moment -- and getting "likes" might certainly brighten your day — you don't want the immediate thrill of posting something laughable or venting about your kid's embarrassing habits to interfere with his life in years to come.

- **Share smart — and safe.**

If you decide to share photos or videos of your kid online, make sure you're sharing safely. Set your privacy settings to "friends only" or, if the platform allows, specify a particular audience who can view your album. Without privacy settings, your family photos might end up on the screens of strangers. Avoid geotagging a picture (linking it to a location), which might unintentionally alert others to where your kid is hanging out. And, determine how to keep information like birthdays, street signs, and school names out of your pictures. Some parents even come up with ways to talk about their kids on social media without linking to their kids' real names, by using made-up nicknames or code names. Also, it's important to remember that by posting images up on certain social media accounts, you are essentially giving that organization licensing rights to that image. As of July 2015, Instagram's policy includes the statement, "you hereby grant to Instagram a non-exclusive, fully paid and royalty-free, transferable, sub-licensable, worldwide license to use the Content that you post on or through the Service ..."

- **If your kid voices a preference, listen up.**

If your kid is already thinking about her digital footprint and the kind of digital identity she wants to portray, give her an extra pat on the back — and listen carefully to her requests! If she asks you not to post a picture, it should certainly give you pause and you should think twice before going against her wishes. The picture will form her digital identity. Plus, leading by example is key: If you respect her wishes, she's more likely to practice a similar respect for others when she has her own profiles in the future.

Note: Tips here are informed by Common Sense's parenting advice:

<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/privacy-and-internet-safety/is-it-safe-to-post-pictures-of-my-kid-online>