

# Are you a ‘sharent’?

For many children online life begins before birth, when their excited parents-to-be post ultrasound images on social media. According to a recent poll, the average parent will share their child’s image online nearly 1000 times before their fifth birthday (The Parent Zone, 2015). For parent bloggers the total is likely to be double that, or more.

The internet can provide fantastic tools for sharing special moments from your child’s early years with family and friends. And online parenting forums, networks and blogs often provide valuable support and reassurance through parenting’s ups and downs.

But before you share, you should give thought to exactly who can see photos and comments featuring your child, and how this online footprint might affect your child in years to come.

## What should you consider?

- **Who’s looking?** When did you last check your privacy settings? On most social networks the default is that any other service user can access your pictures, which may also appear in internet search results. Remember that anyone who can see a photo can also download or screenshot it, and could go on to share it.
- **What else are you sharing?** You might be sharing more than what’s in the post. As default, many cameras, phones and apps tag posts and photos with ‘meta-data’ which can include location details and other identifying information. This is potentially risky for any child, but poses particular risks for vulnerable children such as those who have been fostered or adopted and could be sought online by members of their birth family.
- **Ownership** Under the terms and conditions of most social networks, when you share a photo you licence the network to use and reproduce your image, and grant it the right to licence it for use by third parties. It could be used for commercial purposes, a point deliberately highlighted by the Danish company **Koppie Koppie**, which sold mugs featuring freely downloaded pictures of young children. Another online activity which has distressed parents and carers is the ‘**Baby Role Play**’ game played by some Instagram users, who repost photographs of other people’s children and create fictional identities based on them.
- **Their digital tattoo** Every publically accessible image or comment featuring your child contributes to a public image which will follow them into the future. That apocalyptic nappy incident might make for a hilarious tweet now, but if it comes to light when they’re older, how could it affect the way they feel about themselves, or you, or how others see them? Could their online childhood become an issue if they are seeking a job, or a relationship, or even election to public office?

**Your child’s right to privacy** Psychologist Aric Sigman has **expressed concerned** about the impact on children of the eroding boundaries between private and public online: “Part of the way a child forms their identity involves having private information about themselves that remains private.”

## Parent bloggers

If you’ve set up a blog to share your parenting experiences with a wider audience, you’ve probably already given plenty of thought to issues like your child’s privacy, managing their digital footprint, ownership and copyright, and commercialism.

Strategies adopted by some successful bloggers include: anonymising their own and their child’s identities; involving their child in the material you create and only posting material they are happy with; and carefully monitoring their child’s online presence, for example by checking their name in search aggregator services or setting up a Google Alert for their name.