

# Safer Internet Day: Top tips to warn your children about the dangers of online photo sharing



When young people first go online it can be difficult for them to figure out the boundary between what should go online and what should stay offline.

February 10 sees the launch of Safer Internet Week, an EU initiative which aims to provide children and teenagers with the skills to fight dangers posed by the internet.

---

Children and teenagers often don't entirely understand the boundaries of the photographs they share online and so it is vital that the risks and dangers are communicated with them clearly.

Below are ten expert tips to communicate with your child about the risks posed by sharing photographs online or even within their social circle.

## **Once you share a photo you lose control of it**

Kids and teens often aren't aware of how public things can be online. They may not understand that once they share a photo online they lose control of who sees the

image and how it is used or altered. It is very easy to share a photo online but it is not so easy to take it down. Within minutes a photo can be shared with thousands of people. Even if your children use private messages or apps to share photos it's still very easy for people to take a screenshot or photo of what they've shared. These people can then share your child's picture wherever they like.

### **The Granny Rule**

When young people first go online it can be difficult for them to figure out the boundary between what should go online and what should stay offline. It's a good idea to talk with your kids about what photos they share online and with their friends. Highlight to them that it's important that they never take photos where people expect privacy or share photos of a more personal nature. One way of helping your children decide if a photo is okay to share online is The Granny Rule. If they wouldn't show a particular photo to their granny then it probably shouldn't be online.

### **Respect others**

As well as thinking about how sharing a photo might affect your kids themselves, you should also chat about how sharing images might affect the other people in the pictures. If the photo might embarrass or get someone in trouble, encourage your child to be responsible and delete the photo. He or she might think it's okay to share a picture with a private group of friends. However, sharing a digital image is like telling a secret to someone. Once it's shared once, the photo could end up anywhere.

### **Watch your space**

If your children have social networking profiles where people can post comments on their photos, highlight the importance of checking these comments regularly. If they receive comments that annoy or anger them they should avoid replying. Instead they should delete the comment, block the person, and report the incident to the website owner or service provider.

### **Who and where**

It's not a good idea to give away where you are online. By sharing and tagging photos in real time and publicising what s/he is doing, your child might leave him/herself vulnerable. Indeed we've all heard about burglaries that took place when someone's holiday photos inadvertently advertised the fact that their house was empty for the week. Remind your child to be careful about sharing too many personal details online through their photos.



If you think your children might be revealing too much of themselves online and attracting the wrong kind of attention, it's something you need to address with them.

### **Know who can see you**

Before your children join social networking services talk with them about the privacy settings and options available. Many sites allow you to decide which parts of your profile can be accessed by others. Assume that everything is public unless you are sure that it isn't. Opting for private doesn't always mean that only friends can see your child's profile. In some cases, everything your child puts on his/her profile can be seen by everyone but only friends can post comments or IM him/her. You should also stress the point that profile photos are nearly always available for everyone to see.

### **Check your tags**

It's all well and good for your child to be educated about the privacy settings on social networking sites. However they will still be vulnerable if their friends aren't as vigilant about their own privacy settings. One way of protecting online reputation is to be in control of what photos you're tagged in. Encourage your children to be required to approve any photos they're tagged in. Otherwise your child's photo might end up public, depending on the privacy settings of their friends.

## **“Friends” and friends**

Talk with your children about being selective about who they become friends with; you can tell a lot about someone by the company they keep. Even though they are called friends, people you ‘add’ are really little more than acquaintances, nobody has 500 friends. Add people you know. Be as popular as you are or aren't. As soon as your child adds a friend online he/she usually gives that person access to all of his/her photos and online content.

## **Know who has permission to use your photos**

Remind your children to be very careful when playing games, taking quizzes and using different apps through their social networking accounts. Often times these apps require you to give access to your email, location or profile picture before they allow you to sign up. Once you’ve given permission (which takes only a few seconds) the apps can use your photo and information however they like. Sometimes these photos can end up in ads for dating services and other adult websites, the last place any parent would want their young teenager’s photo.

## **Representing yourself online**

As children become tweens and become teenagers they will experiment with different forms of self-expression. This is all part of growing up but it is important to have a talk with your children about how they present themselves online. You might think that your teenagers take far too many selfies. It mightn’t be as bad as it seems. Often times they are just taking control of how they want to present themselves to the world. However, if you think your children might be revealing too much of themselves online and attracting the wrong kind of attention, it’s something you need to address with them.

## **Talk about apps**

Get to know the apps and services your children are using by having them show you how they work. You might also find Webwise useful <http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise> for getting the facts on some the most popular services used by young people, such as Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp.

## **Don’t be intimidated by technology**

Lots of parents are a little nervous around technology and assume that their kids are the experts in that domain. While your child might be a whizzkid when it comes to instagramming and vlogging that doesn’t make you redundant as a parent. You may not know all there is to know about blogs and walls but you do know about parenting and all the same principles apply regarding setting rules and boundaries that are relevant in other aspects of your child’s life.

## **Go easy on the baby photos**

This one is for all you new parents out there. Social networking services and messaging apps are a great way to keep in touch with friends. However you should really think about how much of your child's life you put up online. We all know those people who share every step of their babies' lives, from the first sonograms to bath time to their first days at school. Be conscious of the fact that it's very easy for these pictures to get into the wrong hands and end up being used in upsetting contexts. Even if it is just friends who are viewing your child's progress, said child mightn't be too happy when embarrassing baby photos come back to haunt him/her in years to come.

## **What to do when something goes wrong**

If someone makes contact with your child in an inappropriate or hurtful way, advise your child to block them, keep the message or comment as evidence, and report them to the owner of the website. Don't respond to bullying or harassing contacts: this just creates more trouble. In the case of bullying photos encourage your child to tell an adult, who he or she trusts. Your child might talk to you or a teacher or guidance councillor about it. Your child's school should be able to take some action as they all have bullying policies that cover this kind of thing.

## **Help is out there**

More serious cases that could be illegal, such as if someone makes inappropriate sexual suggestions or is 'grooming' an under 16 years old, can be reported to <http://ceop.police.uk/>. All reports are taken very seriously and passed on when appropriate. If your child needs someone to talk to they can call Childline at 0800 1111.