Digital Footprints and Photo Sharing

Today's social media makes photo sharing easy. Kids love to follow friends' photos, share casual moments visually, and simply stay in touch. However, kids don't always think through what they post. Photos they thought were private can easily go public. Likewise, their choice of photos can affect others as well. Together, discuss the importance of showing respect to oneself and others when sharing photos online.

- **Set boundaries together.**

  Discuss your family's values and expectations around photo sharing. Photos that show illegal behavior (for example, underage drinking or texting while driving) are clearly a no-go. But agreeing where to draw the line on certain other photos — for example, pictures of your daughter in her bikini or your son making a rude gesture to the camera — may pose a challenge. Start by discussing the possible consequences of posting these types of pictures. How will they affect your kids' reputation? Remind your kids that once they post a picture online, it's out of their control — such photos could be seen by a friend's parent, a college admissions counselor, or a future employer. Online content is easily searchable and often ends up in hands of those we didn't intend it for. And it is easily taken out of context. Lastly, it also is permanent, meaning it can resurface at any time.

- **Remind your kids to consider the impact of a photo on the people in the picture.**

  It may not be realistic to expect your kids to get everyone's permission before they upload an image, but it's a worthy goal. When they're about to upload a picture that someone has just snapped, encourage them to stop and ask, "Hey — I'm going to put this on Instagram, is that okay with everyone?" Ask your kid to think honestly if every person in the photograph would be comfortable with the photo going online. If she misjudges and someone asks her to take a photo down, tell her it is her responsibility to remove the photograph. The best way to drive this concept home is to set an example. If you want to upload a photo of your child from a recent family vacation, first ask permission to do so or ask for her feedback. This can also offer a great opportunity to model this type of respect with your child.

- **Encourage your kid to talk face-to-face with a person who posts an unflattering photo.**

  Online photo sharing is a part of our world today, and opting out is unlikely. Even if your kids choose not to share photos online, their friends might upload photos of them. But it can be difficult to ask others not to post or to take down photographs. If your child is struggling with what to say, you can offer the following as an example, "Hey, I already untagged myself from the photo you put up, but I was wondering if you would be okay with taking it down. It's not my favorite picture and I'd rather if it wasn't on [Facebook/Instagram/etc.]. I'd really appreciate it." It may be helpful to have the conversation offline, face-to-face, so that it doesn't end up further perpetuating a digital problem.

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