



Common Sense on Privacy and Digital Footprints

Primary School

What's the Issue?

Our children live in a culture of sharing that has changed the concept of privacy forever. In a world where everyone is connected and anything created online can be copied, pasted, and sent to thousands of people in a heartbeat, privacy starts to mean something different than simply guarding personal or private information. In this context, you might think about children's privacy in three categories: privacy and security, privacy and reputation, and privacy and advertising.

- **Privacy and security:** This is the private information (e.g., Social Security number, first and last name) that could put children at risk of identity theft if it got into the wrong hands.
- **Privacy and reputation:** The information that could be personally embarrassing or hurtful to them or others if posted publicly.
- **Privacy and advertising:** The information about their habits and behaviour online that companies collect in order to target them with ads and other content.

Why It Matters

For good or evil, everything our children do online creates digital footprints that migrate and persist. Children share work with others and, as they get older, receive comments and feedback. This culture of sharing is beneficial in many ways. But if children aren't careful, their reputations can be harmed, or their information used in ways they never intended. For example, your child may think he or she just sent something to a friend, but that friend can send it to a friend's friend, who can send it to their friends' friends, and so on. Or they may innocently fill in an online form without understanding that this may make them vulnerable to identity theft. And their online behaviour is likely to be tracked without them knowing by the industry, which has little incentive to be responsible.

Common Sense Says

- *Make sure children get your permission before filling in forms.* Let children know that you are the gatekeeper. They should ask your permission before filling in online forms, and they should always keep their Social Security number, birth date, address, and full name private.
- *Help children think long term.* Everything online leaves a digital footprint. Help them think before they post so that they will be proud of their Internet presence later on.
- *Remind children that the Golden Rule applies online.* Remind children that they will be treated online as they treat others. Whatever negative things they say can and probably will come back to haunt them, in more ways than they can imagine.
- *Help children see through advertising.* The next time an ad pops up online, or you see that you are being targeted by ads specific to your interests, point it out to your children. Let them know that some companies advertise to you based on what kinds of things you look at online.



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What Families Can Do Together

- *Draw a digital footprint with your kid and have him or her fill it in only with the kind of information they would safely put online (younger primary).*
- *Bring up an age-appropriate webpage that has ads on it, and make your children identify the ads (middle primary).*
- *Show children how their email or personal pages have ads that differ from the pages of their friends (older primary).*