

Parents putting kids at risk online, research shows

Lanai Scarr, Senior Writer, News Corp Australia Network

April 2, 2019 8:00pm

Subscriber only

-
-
-

Exclusive: Parents are ignoring the risks of social media and are sharing too much of their kids lives online putting them at significant risk, new research shows.

While much of the focus has been on teaching kids how to navigate cyber space and be safe online, News Corp Australia can reveal the findings of research that shows parents may be just as much to blame for the dangers children are facing online.

And it has experts worried, with several saying it serves as a wake up call for parents.

One in five Australian parents say photos they have posted of their children on social media have been shared elsewhere without their consent and more than 1 in 10 have experienced negative comments posted on pictures of their kids.



The focus has been on teaching children online safety. But parents also need to sit down for a lesson or two, a new study has found. Picture: Getty Images

RELATED STORIES:

[PM Scott Morrison labels social media dangerous](#)

[One in four Aussie kids turning to drugs to cope with bullying](#)

[Government's plan to keep kids safe online](#)

Despite this, 80 per cent of parents still post photos of their children to social media. Facebook and Instagram are the most popular platforms for parents posting pictures

of their children, however 11 per cent are also sharing photos of their children to Twitter, which does not allow private profiles.

Only 13 per cent of parents refrain from posting photos of their kids online because of privacy concerns — despite 84 per cent of them citing privacy as either ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ important, and nearly a quarter having had negative experiences from posting photos of their kids online. The research was conducted of 1225 parents nationally by research firm dynata on behalf of Momatu a private digital timeline app for families.

Of the parents that post pictures of their kids to social media, almost half (45 per cent) do so at least once a week or more, with 14 per cent of parents posting daily.



Nearly half of parents that post pictures of their kids online do so at least once a week. Picture: Getty Images

Eminent child psychologist and cyber expert Michael Carr-Gregg said the research highlighted how little Aussie parents understood about the dangers online.

“Apart from the fact that it’s setting a terrible example, it’s also potentially exposing children to a whole range of strangers and paedophiles online and therefore putting their children at risk,” Dr Carr-Gregg said.

“While the government is investing in giving children the skills, knowledge and strategies to use the internet safely, this research suggests that similar efforts need to be directed towards adults for parents.”

Digital expert and mum of three Kristy Goodwin said parents were often confused about where to turn to for expert advice on keeping their kids safe online.

“I believe many parents are floundering in the digital world,” Dr Goodwin said.

“As a result, their kids are swimming in a digital stream and there aren’t enough adults supervising, nor are they teaching kids and teens how to swim in the digital stream safely. We need parents to take a more proactive stance.”



Dr Michael Carr-Gregg says parents are setting a bad example for their kids. Communications Minister Mitch Fifield said the government was committed to keeping kids safe online but that it was a shared responsibility with parents, carers, teachers, government and industry.

“The findings of this study accord with other research that shows that parents may not be fully aware of the risks their children face online,” Senator Fifield said.

Esafety commissioner Julie Inman Grant said parents needed to be aware of the risks associated with posting pictures of their kids online, particularly on open accounts or platforms.

“(Parents) should think carefully about who can see the photos and what information they may be giving away without realising it, because even a school crest or a team logo can say a lot about where our kids spend their time,” Ms Inman Grant, a former Microsoft and Twitter executive, said.

“Also, it’s important to be aware that perfectly innocent images of children, wearing swimwear for instance, can be harvested from public social media accounts and used for sexual purposes.”



Communications Minister Mitch Fifield says parents should think carefully about who can see their photos on social media. Picture: AAP

Executive director of The Parenthood Alys Gagnon said asking parents to stop sharing the most important part of their lives — their children — was “pretty unreasonable”.

“We should be educating parents about the dangers of sharing photos about children online while we push the big social media companies, who make billions in profits from our data, to make privacy and personal security easy,” Ms Gagnon said.

“Parents don’t deliberately put their children at risk, so I think this shows that people either don’t understand the dangers of posting children’s photos online, or don’t know how to lock down their social media profiles so that sharing is safer.”

Andrew Muir, Founder of Momatu, said the worries of Australian parents about social media were not reflected in their own usage.

“In order to keep family and friends updated on their children, parents choose to risk sharing photos online despite the dangers involved. They do this because there are few practical alternatives available to them and they believe recording and sharing life’s ‘keeper’ moments is important,” Mr Muir said.

lanai.scarr@news.com.au

[@pollitracker](#)

