Digital Footprints & Photo Sharing

What makes up your digital footprint? Who can access the content you share online? How can you make sure funny pictures aren't taken out of context and used against you?

Social media sites make photo sharing easy, and following friends' photos can be a great way to keep in touch. But sharing can be so easy that photos intended for close friends may be shared online without full consideration of who else might eventually access them. Many of us have been told — or have cautioned others — not to share anything that we wouldn't want aired on national television. But for some people, this is more than just a thought experiment: It becomes a reality. Today's case focuses on photo sharing and digital footprints, raising questions about what you need to know to talk to your child about their online photo sharing and footprints.

Key Vocabulary

digital footprint

A digital footprint is a record of everything an individual does online, including the content they upload. Every time you go online, you leave a footprint that can be searched, shared and seen by a large invisible audience. All of your actions online — and all of the content that you share or that others share about you — creates your digital footprint. Online, information can migrate, persist, and resurface years later.

Note: In order to authentically capture the issue, this video shares an image from a real Facebook profile that some parents may find distressing or embarrassing.

The Case

Watch the clip from The Ellen DeGeneres Show ("You posted that on Facebook?"). In this segment, Ellen shows embarrassing pictures of her audience members that she found on Facebook.

▶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCaKuAdKumA

To ensure that you have enough time for all the materials, it is helpful to load the video beforehand so that you don't have to deal with it buffering during the discussion.

Consider

- In one word, what is your reaction to the clip? What were you feeling while you watched the segment?

- What do you think of Ellen's decision to do this segment on her show? Is it okay? Why or why not?

- What kinds of content would you be embarrassed to have broadcasted in this way (for yourself or for your child)?

- At the end of the clip, Ellen shows embarrassing pictures of Megan. Megan is in the audience with her mom, who doesn't follow Megan on Facebook. How would you feel if you saw learned about something your child did because of what someone else saw on Facebook? Does this seem like a realistic possibility?

- Megan's friend who is also in the picture did not choose to share it and did not even go to the show, yet her embarrassing photo was also shared publicly. How can we manage what pictures other share?

- There are so many platforms for easy photo sharing. Have you ever had a conversation with your child about photo sharing? Are there any grey areas or do you see the question of what to share/not share as a "black and white" issue?

- How can we support kids in a world with new and shifting privacy norms? What role can parents play?

> You may want to review the discussion questions ahead of time. In the interest of time, you may want to identify those that you think will work best for the group. Also, feel free to let the group drive the conversation as long as it stays on topic.

> If your group seems hesitant or quiet, suggest a "think-pair-share": Have participants turn to the person sitting next to them to share their answers to a question. Then, come back together as a group and ask what came up in their paired conversations.

Wrapping up: Feel free to look at the tip sheet together and invite reactions. You can again invite people to read quietly and then react by posing questions, such as: *Which of these tips resonates most for you? Are there any tips you would definitely try? What is missing?*
If you are running low on time, distribute the tip sheets at the end of your meeting. The trick is to make sure people are leaving with some concrete information, rather than feeling overwhelmed and wondering what to do next.

The Ellen DeGeneres Show. "You Posted That on Facebook?" *YouTube* Video, 7:13. September 2, 2014.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCaKuAdKumA