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Why parents should reconsider sharing photos of their children online

Despite claims by social media platforms to have safety mechanisms in place for children, they often fail in practice. Parents need to be engaged with their children's online safety, as the platforms prioritise their business models over child protection. Parents should also be very cautious about what they share online and closely monitor their children's posts.

Child predators caught with collections of images have often obtained them from unknowing parents who post pictures of their children online.

Here are some facts that support this concern:

1. Social media platforms and online photo-sharing websites have made it easier for anyone to access and download images, including innocent pictures of children posted by parents.
2. Child predators have been known to frequent family-oriented social media groups, forums, or hashtags to find and collect images of children, even if these pictures are not explicit or suggestive in nature.
3. In some cases, innocent photos of children posted by parents have been found on child exploitation websites, where they have been altered, shared, or used to identify potential targets.
4. According to a study by the Australian eSafety Commissioner, more than half of the images found on child exploitation websites originated from social media accounts or family blogs, which highlights the risk of images being misused by predators.
5. A report by the UK's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) found that offenders are known to use social media and other online platforms to gather information about potential victims and to access images and videos of children.

Predatory individuals, such as "creepers" who stalk children online, use emojis as codes to identify accounts of interest. The legality of watching content on social media makes it difficult to catch predators, who often operate in a grey area.

It is difficult to provide precise statistics on the number of predators online, as these individuals engage in illegal activities and often operate covertly, making them hard to identify and track. Additionally, these numbers can change over time as law enforcement agencies work to apprehend and prosecute those involved in such activities.

According to some estimates, as of 2021, there were tens of thousands of paedophiles and child predators operating online worldwide. However, it is important to note that these numbers are not definitive and might not accurately represent the current situation.

Preventing online child exploitation is an ongoing effort for law enforcement agencies, governments, and non-profit organisations. As internet users, it is crucial to remain vigilant, report suspicious activities, and educate ourselves and others about online safety.

Ignoring the issue of online safety is not an option, as it can lead to devastating consequences. Digital photos can contain information about the time, date, and location, so it's important to check privacy settings and limit their functionality.

- Sharing images of children online without their knowledge or consent can lead to issues for them in the future, such as embarrassment or a lack of understanding of consent and respect.
- While social media platforms claim to prioritise safety, more often than not they don't. It is crucial for parents to be proactive in protecting their children online.
- To minimise the risk of your child's photos being misused, it's essential to be cautious when sharing images online:
- Adjust your privacy settings to ensure that only friends and family can view your photos.
- Share fewer photos of your child and be selective about what you post.
- Avoid sharing identifiable information, such as your child's full name, birthdate, or location. Also reconsider first day of school photos, anything in sport uniforms or dance outfits, photos of birthday cakes on their actual birthday and how old they are. Remember we have been teaching kids to never share this kind of information since they were tiny!
- Ensure that your child's photos do not include recognisable landmarks, schools, or street signs.
- Turn off the geotagging feature on your phone or camera to avoid sharing your child's location.
- Always exercise caution and consider the potential risks when sharing photos of your children online.

If you suspect online grooming contact law enforcement immediately.

In Australia

If you suspect online grooming and you are in Australia, contact www.acce.gov.au immediately. Online grooming is a serious problem in Australia, and the Australian government has taken several steps to address it through legislation.

Here's a summary of the online grooming laws in Australia:

Criminal Code Amendment (Protecting Minors Online) Act 2017: This law makes it a criminal offence to use a carriage service (such as the internet or social media) to groom a child under the age of 16 for sexual activity. The offence carries a maximum penalty of 15 years imprisonment.

Enhancing Online Safety (Non-consensual Sharing of Intimate Images) Act 2018: This law makes it a criminal offence to share intimate images without consent. It also provides a scheme for victims to apply to have the images removed from social media platforms.

Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Crimes Against Children and Community Protection Measures) Act 2020: This law amends various offences related to child sexual abuse, including grooming offences, to increase the maximum penalties and create new offences.

Online Safety Act 2021: This law establishes a new regulatory framework for online safety, which includes provisions to combat cyberbullying, online harassment, and harmful online content. The law creates a new eSafety Commissioner who has the power to issue removal notices to online services that host prohibited content, including grooming material.

Criminal Code Act 1995: This law contains various provisions related to child sexual abuse, including grooming offences. The law provides for penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment for using a carriage service to groom a child under the age of 16 for sexual activity. Carly's Law is an Australian law named after Carly Ryan, a 15-year-old girl who was murdered by a man she met online.

The law was passed in 2017 and makes it a criminal offence for an adult to use the internet to lie about their age and identity in order to meet a minor for sexual activity. The law carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. Carly's Law is an important step in protecting children from online grooming and exploitation, and serves as a reminder of the dangers of online predators.

In Hong Kong

Under the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200) of Hong Kong, it is a criminal offense to engage in any behaviour that is considered to be child grooming, including online grooming. Section 161E of the ordinance states that anyone who communicates with a child with the intention of committing a sexual offense against the child may be found guilty of an offence.

The ordinance defines a child as a person under the age of 16 years. The law prohibits a range of activities, including communicating with a child for the purpose of obtaining their trust, encouraging a child to engage in sexual activity, and making arrangements to meet with a child for sexual purposes.

If convicted, an offender can face a maximum sentence of 14 years imprisonment. The punishment can be more severe if the offender commits any other sexual offense against the child.

In New Zealand

In New Zealand, online grooming is addressed under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015. This law makes it illegal to send or publish harmful digital communications, including those that are intended to cause distress, incite violence or self-harm, or target individuals with harassment, threats, or invasive messages.

Online grooming is considered a form of harmful digital communication, and therefore, it is a criminal offence to groom a child online with the intent of engaging in sexual activity. The maximum penalty for an individual who is found guilty of online grooming is up to 7 years imprisonment.

In the UK

In the UK, online grooming is addressed under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. This law makes it illegal to communicate with a child under the age of 16 for the purpose of meeting with them with the intention of committing a sexual offence. The law also criminalizes the use of the internet or other electronic communication devices to groom a child for sexual activity. The maximum penalty for online grooming is 14 years imprisonment.

In addition to the Sexual Offences Act, the UK government has established the National Crime Agency's Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Command, which is dedicated to identifying and combating online child sexual abuse.

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