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Report Highlights

Over half of mothers and one-third of fathers discuss parenting on social media.

Parents say social media is most useful for making them feel they are not alone (72%).

Three-quarters of parents point to "oversharenting" by another parent.

Contact us

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit.

Parents on Social Media: Likes and Dislikes of Sharenting

For parents of young children, social media offers ways to seek and share advice about parenting challenges and to help friends and relatives stay in touch with their child. At the same time, a growing awareness of [internet safety](#) issues has prompted questions about whether this so-called "sharenting" may lead to breaches of private information that could put children at risk.

In November/December 2014, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children aged 0-4 years about their benefits and concerns related to sharing parenting information on social media.

Social Media Experiences of Parents

Most parents of young children (84% of mothers, 70% of fathers) report using social media like Facebook, online forums, or blogs. Over half of mothers (56%), compared with only 34% of fathers, discuss child health and parenting topics on social media.

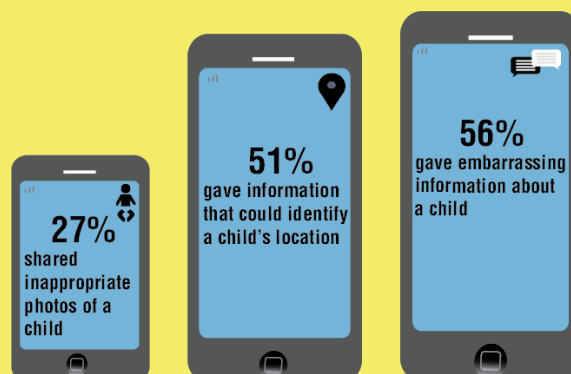
When sharing parenting advice on social media, common topics include getting kids to sleep (28%), nutrition/eating tips (26%), discipline (19%), daycare/preschool (17%), and behavior problems (13%).

Parents rate social media as useful for making them feel like they are not alone (72%), learning what not to do (70%), getting advice from more experienced parents (67%), and helping them worry less (62%). In contrast, about two-thirds of parents are concerned about someone finding out private information about their child (68%) or sharing photos of their child (67%), while 52% are concerned that when older, their child might be embarrassed about what they have shared on social media.

The majority of parents who use social media (74%) know of another parent who has shared too much information about a child on social media, including parents who gave embarrassing information about a child (56%), offered personal information that could identify a child's location (51%), or shared inappropriate photos of a child (27%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Perceptions of oversharenting on social media

74% of parents feel another parent shared too much online



This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in November/December 2014 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. Responses from parents with a child 0-4 (n=569) were used for this report. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 51% among parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 3 to 8 percentage points.

Implications

Parents of young children have numerous social media channels to communicate about the joys and challenges of parenting. Some types of social media (e.g., a Facebook group) provide a way to connect groups of relatives or friends, while others (e.g., parenting blogs, comment sections to online articles) bring together opinions and experiences around a specific topic.

Parents in this national poll cite many benefits of using social media to seek and share parenting advice, most notably around feeling that they are not alone with parenting concerns. Sharing photos and anecdotes helps distant relatives and friends stay in touch. Connecting with another parent who is awake in the middle of the night can help to counteract feelings of isolation. Asking for other parents' recommendations can facilitate the choice of a new childcare provider. Hearing about strategies used by other parents can offer practical tips to deal with a toddler's behavior problem.

Parents also recognize that there can be downsides to sharing too much information about children on social media. For example, "oversharenting" may occur when details shared on social media are too personal, or are potentially embarrassing to the child when he or she is older. Although there are no hard and fast rules about what is appropriate to share, this poll found that three-fourths of parents think another parent has shared too much information about their child online.

Other concerns about social media use pertain to fears that postings could be used to identify a child's home, childcare or play locations. In certain situations, such as child custody disputes or domestic violence cases, disclosure of identifying information could pose a significant risk.

Many parents employ privacy settings on social media to control who can see their personal information; however, privacy settings are not well understood by all users. Moreover, privacy policies of social media can change, which may reclassify certain types of information, so what is shared privately today is not necessarily guaranteed to be private in the future.

The federal Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) limits the collection or release of information via the Internet prior to 13 years of age; ironically, by that age, many children have a lengthy "digital profile" based on their parents' social media use. Parents need to be thoughtful about their use of social media to discuss parenting issues, and are encouraged to be diligent about understanding privacy policies that could impact the way their child's information is shared.

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