

## **The Picture of Safety: Snapshots in the Internet Age**

We used to show off pictures of our kids by plopping a stuffed photo album on the laps of visiting relatives. In these days of digital convenience, however, only the most efficient families actually print out their pictures. Many of us rely on personal blogs, facebook, or photo sharing sites like flickr to keep our families up to date on how cute our children are.

It's good to keep in mind that when we hit the “post” button we're not only sharing our pictures with friends and family, we're also exposing them to the world. And while it's rare that our photographs are intercepted by those who have inappropriate plans for them, it's important to know that the internet isn't private. Strangers are likely to see your pictures. Here are a few things to keep in mind when deciding which pictures to share on the internet:

- Assume that people you don't know will see the photo. If this makes you uncomfortable, don't post it.
- Never include any identifying elements like an address or full name in the photo, or in the file name.
- Assume that the baby photos you post are going to be available to view for the rest of your child's life. Avoid anything that might embarrass your adult child.
- Use a lower resolution on the photos you post to the internet. Viewers can still see the picture, but anyone who tries to print it out or blow it up will be disappointed with the resulting graininess.
- Apply an electronic watermark to your pictures. This is a barely noticeable identifying signature on the image that will keep it from being claimed by another user. You can apply watermarks with photo processing software like Photoshop.
- Adjust your privacy settings on facebook and photo-sharing sites and check those settings often.
- As your children get older, talk to them about what's appropriate to post online and what isn't. Remind them that future employers may have access to the photos they post.