Children's data is shared and collected

Who knows what about me?

A Children's Commissioner report into the collection and sharing of children's data

Children's Commissioner for England

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The Children's Commissioner for England is Anne Longfield OBE. She speaks up for children and young people so that policymakers and the people who have an impact on their lives take their views and interests into account. Independent of Government and Parliament, the Children's Commissioner for England presents to government, Parliament, and people, long-term change and improvements for all children, particularly the most vulnerable.

Children's data is shared and collected in the home, online, on smartphones and tablets, outside the home, in schools, in the classroom, and biometric systems.
More information is collected and shared about us as we go about our daily lives than ever before. It’s in the screens we watch, the websites and apps we use and the latest must-have toys and gadgets. And it’s not just about technology – information is captured by public services too. Our data footprints are getting bigger and bigger.

This is true for all of us. But the difference for children today is that their data footprints begin from the very moment when their parents proudly upload that first baby photo to social media. By age 18, parents have posted 1300 photos and videos of their child to social media. The amount of information explodes when children themselves start engaging on these platforms: children post to social media 36 times per day – a total of nearly 70,000 posts by age 18.

No one has stopped to think about what this means for children’s lives now and how it may impact on their future lives as adults. We simply do not know what the consequences of all this information about children will be as they develop. If we were adult according to the Children’s Commissioner’s report: ‘We should be happy to continue forever collecting and sharing children’s data?’

I don’t think we should. We all need to pause and think. At the very least, schools need to start educating their pupils about the importance of guarding personal information. Children and parents need to be much more aware of what they share and consider the consequences. Companies that make apps, toys and other products used by children need to stop filling them with trackers, and put their terms and conditions in language that children understand. And crucially, the Government needs to monitor the situation and refine data protection legislation if needed, so that children are genuinely protected – especially as technology develops.

This is only going to get bigger – so let’s take action now to understand and control who knows what about our children.

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<tr>
<th>IN THE HOME</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>ON THE MOVE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connected baby cameras</strong>&lt;br&gt;baby cameras come with easy to guess default passwords, and you are not prompted to change them so hackers can access the video streams.</td>
<td><strong>School databases</strong>&lt;br&gt;4 in 10 schools use CAPITA SIMS to log pupil data.</td>
<td><strong>Retail loyalty schemes</strong>&lt;br&gt;Parents in Boots’ Parenting Club give their due date and are sent vouchers up to age 3. But Boots continue to use this data to send offers to the parent.</td>
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<td><strong>Browsing the web</strong>&lt;br&gt;When browsing the web, people reveal details about themselves, such as their age, likes/dislikes and health conditions.</td>
<td><strong>Location tracking watches</strong>&lt;br&gt;Location tracking watches (aimed at children too young to have their own phone) allow parents to track their location.</td>
<td><strong>Biometric data in schools</strong>&lt;br&gt;Schools use biometric data to register pupils, in school libraries and canteens.</td>
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<td><strong>Parents on social media</strong>&lt;br&gt;Parents can share around 20 photos and videos of their children on social media every year.</td>
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<td><strong>The Red Book</strong>&lt;br&gt;A new digital care record is being developed which health professionals will be able to see.</td>
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<td><strong>Smart speakers</strong>&lt;br&gt;Amazon Echo’s smart speaker stores an audio recording and transcript of every command or question.</td>
<td><strong>Study and behaviour apps</strong>&lt;br&gt;Parents can use apps such as ClassDojo to monitor their child’s progress.</td>
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<td><strong>Children on social media</strong>&lt;br&gt;Children post to social media 36 times per day – a total of nearly 70,000 posts by age 18.</td>
<td><strong>Medical records</strong>&lt;br&gt;More data is being shared in health – e.g. between the NHS and partner companies.</td>
<td><strong>Travel pass</strong>&lt;br&gt;Children have to give information like their age when applying for travel cards. Journey details are stored too.</td>
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