

Children's data is shared and collected



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 when making decisions about them. Independent of Government and Parliament, the Children's Commissioner has unique powers to help bring about long-term change and improvements for all children, particularly the most vulnerable.

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Who knows what about me?

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

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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 13, 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 26 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 our children will be. In the light of this uncertainty, should we 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.



Anne Longfield
Children's Commissioner for England

IN THE HOME

Connected baby cameras

Some cameras come with easy to guess default passwords, and you are not prompted to change them, so hackers can access the video streams.

ONLINE

Browsing the web

When browsing the web people reveal details about themselves, such as their age, likes/dislikes and health conditions.

OUT AND ABOUT

School databases

4 in 5 schools use CAPITA SIMS to log pupil data.

OUT AND ABOUT

Retail loyalty schemes

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.

OUT AND ABOUT

Biometric data in schools

Schools use biometric data to register pupils, in school libraries and canteens.

IN THE HOME

Connected toys

Last year millions of CloudPets messages between children, family and friends were found stored online unprotected.

ONLINE

Parents on social media

Parents with children share around 71 photos and 29 videos of their child every year on social media.

OUT AND ABOUT

Location tracking watches

Location tracking watches (aimed at children too young to have their own phone) allow parents to track their location.

OUT AND ABOUT

Study and behaviour apps

ClassDojo's privacy policy is over 12,000 words. Data is shared with 31 organisations.

OUT AND ABOUT

The Red Book

A new digital care record is being developed which health professionals will be able to see.

IN THE HOME

Smart speakers

Amazon Echo, a smart speaker, stores an audio recording and transcript of every command or question.

ONLINE

Children on social media

Over half of the UK's 11-12 year-olds are on social media.

ONLINE

Smartphones and tablets

Talking Angela (an app with an animated cat game) contains 16 trackers to capture data.

OUT AND ABOUT

Medical records

More data is being shared in health - e.g. between the NHS and partner companies.

OUT AND ABOUT

Travel pass

Children have to give information like their age when applying for travel cards. Journey details are stored too.