

Behind the Lens:

Sharenting, Family Vlogging, and the Psychological Impact of Growing Up Online

by

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Dedication

This capstone is dedicated to my family for being my constant supporters, and to everyone who has walked alongside me in this academic journey.

Abstract

This capstone synthesizes research on the psychological, developmental, and systemic impacts of sharenting, the practice of parents sharing children's images and information online. This work explores how early and ongoing digital exposure influences autonomy, identity formation, and relational boundaries. Guided by Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Bowen Family Systems Theory, and Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach, the literature review synthesizes research on the ways curated online portrayals shape self-concept, disrupt family dynamics, and create lasting digital legacies. The review also evaluates four intervention models, Circle of Security Parenting, Emotion-Focused Family Therapy, Mindful Parenting, and psychoeducation, as potential frameworks for guiding caregivers toward ethical, developmentally informed sharing practices. The capstone addresses implications for mental health professionals, caregivers, policymakers, technology platforms, and community organizations, recommending stronger legal safeguards for child influencers, integration of digital ethics into counselling practice, and platform-level measures to protect minors' privacy. These recommendations aim to support child-centred, ethically responsible approaches to online content creation involving children.

Keywords: dramaturgical approach, family systems theory, influencer, kidfluencer, psychosocial development theory, sharenting, vlog

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Behind the Lens

Chapter 1: Introduction

Transforming the private sphere of family life into a digital spectacle brings forth important questions about children's right to privacy, consent, and the blurred boundaries between personal and public domains, and parenting and performance. Family vlogging is the online practice where parents record and profit from sharing aspects of their home life, including their children, to their audience (Laude, 2024). Family vlogging is closely tied to the broader concept of sharenting a term that combines "sharing" with "parenting". Sharenting is used to describe the regular posting of children's information, images, or videos on social media by parents, family members, or guardians (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Lichtenstein, 2017). Current trends raise important questions about children's digital rights, privacy, and the psychological effects of growing up under constant public scrutiny.

In the digital age, family vlogging has become a widespread and profitable form of online content, where parents document their daily lives and share personal moments with a public audience. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have facilitated this genre, allowing families to transform their everyday experiences into monetized content. While family vlogging can provide financial stability and a sense of community for content creators, it raises considerable ethical concerns regarding children's rights, privacy, and consent (Nottingham, 2019; Steinberg, 2016). In contrast to traditional child actors who are protected by labour laws and industry regulations, children in family vlogs often participate without explicit legal safeguards or the ability to provide informed consent. Their lives are recorded, edited, and shared with vast audiences, shaping their identity formation and development in ways that are not yet fully understood.

This capstone examines how sharenting and family vlogging affect children's psychological and developmental well-being through their digital exposure. In this chapter, I will outline the background and scope of this issue, define the research questions and purpose of the project, and introduce the theoretical frameworks used. In Chapter 2, I will review the relevant literature, highlighting emerging themes in digital identity, child development, and family dynamics. Chapter three will synthesize this information and introduce the applied project: a psychoeducational resource designed to support parents and caregivers in making developmentally appropriate, ethically informed decisions about sharing content involving their children online.

Background

Family vlogging, a practice where parents document their daily lives with children, has grown exponentially over the past decade, with channels documenting everything from everyday routines to major life events (Nottingham, 2019; Vizcaino-Verdú et al., 2022). Parents record and share their children's lives on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, sometimes gaining millions of followers and turning their family life into a full-time career.

From holiday celebrations and birthday parties to doctor visits, first steps, and school milestones, children's experiences become central to the family content. This trend offers viewers an intimate glimpse into family life, often portraying idealized versions of domesticity. Family vloggers can generate substantial income through advertising, sponsorships, and brand partnerships, turning their private lives into lucrative businesses. While such content can cultivate a sense of community and relatability among audiences (Novianti et al., 2023), it raises critical ethical concerns, particularly regarding the involvement of children in monetized content (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017).

The term "sharenting" describes the act of parents/guardians sharing content about their children online (Steinberg, 2024; Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). While it can serve as a means for parents to connect and share experiences, it also poses significant risks to children's privacy and autonomy. Sharenting is now a cultural norm, with recent surveys estimating that by the age of five, the average child has over 1,000 photos posted online by their parents (Leaver, 2017). Family vlogging channels, some with millions of subscribers, take this further by filming and monetizing daily life, often turning children into central figures of entertainment or branding.

The rise of "kidfluencers", children who serve as primary influencers on social media (Masterson, 2021; Abidin, 2023), has further complicated the landscape of digital child labour. These child influencers often participate in content creation that blurs the lines between play and work, resulting in potential exploitation. Critics argue that kidfluencing constitutes child labour, as it involves children in profit-driven activities without adequate legal protections (Abidin, 2023). The ethical implications are significant, as these children may not fully comprehend the long-term consequences of their digital footprints, nor do they have the agency to consent to such public exposure (Abidin, 2023).

Commercializing family vlogging content raises concerns about the commodification of childhood. Parents, acting as content creators, may inadvertently prioritize content that garners higher viewership and engagement, potentially at the expense of their children's well-being. This dynamic can lead to scenarios where children's daily lives are orchestrated to produce marketable content, thereby infringing upon their right to a private and autonomous childhood (Dunn, 2025; Steinberg, 2016). The pressure to maintain a consistent online presence can disrupt children's education, social interactions, and overall development (Dunn, 2025; Steinberg, 2024).

The psychological impact of growing up in the public eye cannot be overlooked. Children featured in family vlogs may experience heightened stress and anxiety due to the constant scrutiny and lack of privacy. The performative nature of vlogging can also affect their self-perception and development, as they may begin to view their worth through the lens of audience approval and online metrics (Martínez & Olsson, 2019). This environment can hinder the formation of a healthy self-concept and lead to long-term emotional and psychological challenges (Martínez & Olsson, 2019).

Legal Protection

The rapid evolution of digital media has outpaced existing legal frameworks, leaving child influencers in a precarious position. Traditional child labour laws, designed for conventional entertainment industries, often do not extend to digital platforms, resulting in a regulatory gap. Without standardized contracts and oversight mechanisms, earnings generated by child influencers may not be appropriately allocated or protected (Gordon, 2024).

The financial incentives associated with monetized content create potential conflicts of interest for parents, who may prioritize content creation over their children's well-being. Many child influencers generate significant revenue for their families, yet there are few legal protections ensuring fair compensation and savings for these children. In British Columbia, child performers in traditional media, such as television, film, and live entertainment, are protected under the Employment Standards Regulation of the Employment Standards Act (RSBC 1996, c 113) (Lachance, 2024). These regulations mandate income protection, work-hour limitations, and chaperone requirements for child actors, ensuring that a portion of their earnings is placed in a trust to prevent financial exploitation. However, these protections do not explicitly extend to

child influencers, leaving them vulnerable to excessive work demands, financial exploitation, and lack of control over their earnings (Lachance, 2024).

The legal ambiguity surrounding child influencers in BC raises concerns about whether children who generate significant income through family vlogging are entitled to the same financial protections as traditional child performers. Unlike child actors, who benefit from mandatory trust accounts and work-hour restrictions, children in family vlogs may not receive any portion of the earnings their content generates (Lachance, 2024). The absence of clear legal safeguards means that parents who manage family vlog channels are not obligated to compensate their children for their participation, even when the children are central to the content's success. The lack of regulation highlights the need for updated policies to address the challenges posed by digital content creation involving minors (Gordon, 2024).

While research into this phenomenon is still emerging, concerns are mounting in several domains: children's right to privacy (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017), long-term impacts on identity development (Choi & Lewallen, 2017; Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024), and the role of consent in child-focused content creation. Clinicians and scholars have also raised the alarm around potential consequences such as role confusion, parentification, and emotional harm stemming from digital overexposure. Despite these concerns, many caregivers remain unaware of the psychological risks, and few accessible tools exist to help them make informed decisions about online sharing.

Particularly troubling is the lack of guidance or psychoeducational resources for parents navigating this terrain. While academic discourse is beginning to examine the ethical and psychological implications of sharenting, this knowledge has not yet been translated into practice in the counselling field. This project address this gap by offering a counselling-informed

psychoeducational tool for parents that can promote healthier family boundaries in online environments.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this capstone is to examine the psychological, developmental, and systemic impacts of sharenting and family vlogging on children and to develop a clinically informed psychoeducational resource for parents. This resource will draw from theory and literature to support caregivers in understanding how digital exposure can affect children's identity, autonomy, and emotional well-being. The aim is to promote ethical, child-centred content-sharing practices that prioritize the mental health and relational security of children on the Internet.

Research Questions

This paper will address the following research questions: What are the psychological and developmental effects of sharenting and family vlogging on children? How does early and ongoing digital exposure influence a child's sense of autonomy, identity, and boundaries? In what ways can caregivers be supported through psychoeducational counselling tools to make ethically responsible, developmentally informed decisions around online sharing?

Significance of the Capstone

This topic is increasingly relevant in clinical counselling, child development, and digital ethics. As social media becomes more integrated into family life, clinicians are being called upon to support parents in navigating new and often ambiguous territory. This project contributes to the field by offering a clear, accessible, and research-informed tool that addresses a contemporary concern with real-world implications. Parenting workshops, mental health professionals, and community programs can use this research as a resource for caregivers, giving

caregivers insight into how digital sharing practices affect their children's development and their relationships.

The implications of this capstone extend to multiple stakeholders, including parents, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. This work supports a cultural shift toward child-centred content practices by promoting greater awareness and responsible digital behaviour. Providing a foundation for further research and advocacy in areas such as children's digital rights, online safety, and family counselling interventions.

Theoretical Orientations

The theories described in Chapter two offer a multidisciplinary foundation for understanding the effects of sharenting. Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1950) highlights how digital exposure may interfere with critical developmental tasks such as autonomy, industry, and identity formation. Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) explains how blurred digital boundaries can disrupt family roles, create enmeshment, and contribute to unhealthy relational dynamics. Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory (1959) offers a sociological lens to understand how children become performers in digital "front stages," often shaped by their parents' need to maintain a certain online image.

Positionality Statement

My interest in this topic stems from my experiences growing up as a Gen Z and observing the rise of family vlogging across social media platforms. As someone who once engaged with family vlogs as a viewer, I have become increasingly critical of the ethical concerns surrounding the involvement of children in monetized content. Recent cases in which former kidfluencers have spoken out about their experiences highlight the lasting impact of

growing up in the public eye, supporting my belief that children's well-being should be prioritized over financial incentives.

Public discourse on this issue has also gained momentum, particularly with recent documentaries such as *Devil in the Family: The Fall of Ruby Franke* (Lambert, 2025), which explores the dark side of family vlogging. The documentary features former child vloggers speaking out about their experiences, highlighting the long-term emotional toll of growing up in a monetized online environment (Lambert, 2025). This increased public awareness further emphasizes the need for research into how family vlogging affects children in these vlogs.

In approaching this research, my positioning is shaped by several aspects of my social location and experiences. As a Caucasian, Western, Gen Z individual who grew up in the digital age, I have been immersed in social media for most of my life. As a counselling student, I am particularly drawn to issues of agency, boundaries, and emotional safety in children. This project reflects my desire to bridge academic research with practical resources that enable caregivers to make informed, ethical choices in the digital realm.

Definition of Terms

Backstage - In Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach, the "Backstage" is the private setting where individuals are free from audience scrutiny, allowing them to discard their performed roles and engage in behaviours that may contradict their public persona (Goffman, 1959, p. 70; Abidin, 2017).

Dramaturgical Approach - Goffman's dramaturgical approach posits that individuals' personalities are fluid and adapt based on social context, emphasizing the performative nature of human interactions (Wood, 2004; Goffman, 1959).

Family Systems Theory - Developed by Murray Bowen, Family Systems Theory conceptualizes the family as an emotional unit in which individual behaviours are shaped by interdependent relationships within the family, multigenerational patterns, and systemic dynamics (Bowen, 1978).

Front stage - In Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach, "Front stage" is the public dimension of social performance, where individuals present themselves in accordance with societal expectations and norms to maintain a coherent identity before an audience (Goffman, 1956; Abidin, 2017).

Influencer - An *influencer* is an individual who has established a substantial online presence and can shape the opinions, behaviours, and purchasing decisions of their followers through social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter (Abidin, 2017).

Kidfluencer - A kidfluencer (a combination of kid and influencer) refers to a child who gains significant popularity on social media platforms, often through sponsored content, brand collaborations, and monetized videos (Masterson, 2021).

Performative Parenting - Strategic presentation of parenting to an audience, with the goal of being praised.

Psychosocial Development Theory - Erik Erikson's theory outlines a series of eight developmental stages across the lifespan, each characterized by a central psychological conflict that influences an individual's personality and social relationships. The successful resolution of these conflicts fosters psychological well-being, while unresolved challenges may lead to difficulties in personal and social development (Erikson, 1950).

Sharenting - "Sharenting" is a term that combines *sharing* and *parenting*, referring to the practice of parents publicly sharing images, videos, or information about their children on social media and other online platforms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Lichtenstein, 2017).

Vlog - A vlog (short for video blog or video log) is a form of digital content in which individuals document and share personal experiences, opinions, or informational content through video format, typically on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram (Talukdar, 2020).

Vlogger - A vlogger (video blogger) is an individual who creates and shares vlogs as a form of content creation.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of sharenting and family vlogging, outlining the contemporary concerns related to children's digital exposure and its potential impact on psychological and relational development. The purpose of the capstone, research questions, and theoretical frameworks were established. The next chapter will explore the literature on digital parenting, identity development, and family dynamics. Chapter three will synthesize these insights to support the development of a psychoeducational resource to guide parents toward ethical, developmentally informed content-sharing practices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The growing trend of sharenting and family vlogging raises ethical questions about children's psychological, developmental, and relational well-being. As children's images, experiences, and identities are recorded and shared online, often without their explicit consent, scholars have raised concerns about the long-term effects of such exposure (Rahayu, 2023; Kumar et al., 2023). Researchers draw attention to potential disruptions in children's autonomy (Cai, 2023), identity formation (Ivantes-Rodrigues et al., 2025), and the establishment of personal boundaries (Čepukienė, 2022). Gaining a deeper understanding of how digital exposure influences a child's developing sense of self can inform clinical approaches and help caregivers make more informed choices about online sharing.

This chapter reviews relevant theoretical and empirical contributions related to the phenomenon of sharenting and family vlogging. It first examines three theoretical frameworks that conceptualize the potential developmental, relational, and performative impacts of children's digital exposure: Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1950), Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978), and Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical Approach. Following the discussion of theoretical orientations, the chapter reviews four psychoeducational interventions: Circle of Security (Cooper et al., 2009), Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) (Lafrance, et al., 2020), Mindful Parenting (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997), and psychoeducation, that offer developmentally informed strategies for supporting caregivers. In this review, the chapter synthesizes current literature to contextualize the research questions guiding this capstone project.

As digital technologies increasingly shape family life, theoretical perspectives are needed to critically evaluate how practices like sharenting impact child development and family dynamics. The first section in this capstone draws upon three major frameworks: Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1950); Bowen Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978); and Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach (1959), to explore the psychological, relational, and performative dimensions of sharenting. These theories help highlight how public sharing can influence children's autonomy, identity formation, and family dynamics. Combined, these theories' perspectives provide a foundation for understanding the complex implications of documenting childhood in public digital spaces.

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory provides a framework for examining how sharenting and family vlogging may impact children's psychological development. According to Erick Erikson (1950), individuals progress through a series of psychosocial stages, each defined by a central developmental task. Stages such as autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, and identity versus role confusion are especially relevant when considering how digital visibility during early life may shape developmental outcomes.

Impact on Autonomy and Initiative

The practice of sharenting prompts questions about psychosocial development (Cai, 2023), particularly in relation to Erikson's stages of autonomy and initiative. Erik Erikson explains that during these stages, children develop autonomy and initiative, which form the foundation for independent interaction with the social world and the shaping of their personal identity (Maree, 2022). When parents repeatedly share images of toddlers making mistakes, such

as potty-training challenges, without the child's consent, it can undermine the child's emerging self-efficacy (Erikson, 1950).

Research shows that sharenting can influence the development of autonomy (Cai, 2023). Children may experience impediments to feeling secure and autonomous when personal milestones are publicly scrutinized. This exposure can lead to a sense of paralysis, constraining children's efforts to explore identity independently (Deci & Ryan, 1987; West et al., 2023). Parental behaviours surrounding sharenting may promote a controlling rather than autonomy-supportive environment, as curating a child's online persona may stifle their ability to make independent life choices, affecting central developmental milestones (Wei et al., 2022).

The influence of social media spaces, where children feel pressured to perform, is reinforced by findings that motivations for mid-adolescent social media use often stem from fears of social exclusion rather than authentic connection (West et al., 2023). Sharenting increases this phenomenon, leading children to navigate social integration while experiencing a suppression of autonomy. As experiences are curated and achievements publicly showcased, children may struggle to develop an independent sense of self (Rice & Cun, 2021).

Growing up in an environment where sharenting is common may limit children's ability to experiment and make mistakes without public scrutiny, a process necessary for the development of initiative. In situations where parents excessively control their children's choices, children may internalize feelings of shame or doubt, which can restrict their willingness to act independently (Makhubela, 2012). When sharenting practices strongly influence environments, they prioritize curated images of success and leave little room for the authentic experiences of trial, error, and self-correction needed to develop initiative.

Research states that autonomy-supportive parental strategies improve emotional well-being and self-initiative (Holt et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2022). In contrast, overexposure via sharenting may foster vulnerability and diminished self-efficacy, while excessive parental control limits growth opportunities needed for initiative development (Rawiadji & Limanta, 2021). Lack of autonomy-supportive practices is associated with internalizing symptoms like anxiety and self-doubt, particularly during adolescence when identity consolidation is a major developmental task (Okeke et al., 2009; Wei et al., 2022).

Children who are motivated by public validation may internalize ideals of conformity rather than authenticity, resulting in a reduced sense of individuality (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020). Thus, the digital documentation of childhood may interfere with psychosocial development, reinforcing the need for parenting strategies that encourage independence in a changing digital landscape (Alpuğan, 2024).

Industry and the Social Self

Sharenting also shapes experiences during Erikson's stage of Industry and the development of the Social Self. The industry stage involves the development of skills, competencies, and productivity (Erikson, 1950). By broadcasting children's successes and failures, sharenting interacts with this developmental period.

When parents share children's academic or extracurricular achievements, it may increase motivation but also lead to pressure to perform (Archer & Kao, 2018; Ranzini et al., 2020). Public exposure to successes and failures can encourage performance anxiety and reduce intrinsic motivation (Baxter & Czarnecka, 2025; Keskin et al., 2023).

The practice of sharenting can alter children's views on privacy and self-presentation (Jorge et al., 2021; Walrave et al., 2022). Growing up in highly publicized environments may

cause children to internalize a reduced sense of privacy and see themselves as public spectacles (Jorge et al., 2021; Jungselius et al., 2024). This dynamic can result in a gap between childrens' lived experiences and the version of themselves they present online, which may affect their self-concept and self-esteem (Tomé et al., 2016; Tomé et al., 2012).

Children whose personal moments are shared publicly by parents may face peer scrutiny. Content posted without their consent can lead to feelings of alienation, ridicule, or social comparison (Keskin et al., 2023; Wardhani & Sekarasih, 2021). Social feedback based on curated portrayals may influence children to adjust their behaviour to meet perceived expectations, disrupting peer relationship formation (Beuckels et al., 2024; Wardhani & Sekarasih, 2021).

Sharenting practices may help parents connect with online communities that offer support to parents (Archer & Kao, 2018; Ögel, 2022), but they also create opportunities for families to compare their children's achievements, which can create indirect pressure for children to perform to external expectations (Baxter & Czarnecka, 2025; Keskin et al., 2023).

Commercialized sharenting, primarily when driven by influencer culture, changes childhood experiences into content for audiences. This trend influences how children understand privacy, autonomy (Beuckels et al., 2024; Campaña et al., 2020), and self-worth in relation to public approval and financial gain (Luong et al., 2024; Ranzini et al., 2020).

These influences may limit children's opportunities to develop authentic social identities through mutual learning, expression, and collaboration. This raises concerns about how caregivers can support social development while navigating changing norms in digital spaces (Archer & Kao, 2018; Jungselius et al., 2024).

Identity and Digital Legacy

Sharenting impacts Erikson's stage of identity formation and the concept of Digital Legacy (Erikson, 1950). During adolescence, individuals engage with questions about their self-concept, values, and social roles. Parents' sharenting habits can create online narratives that children are expected to accept as their own. These portrayals may lead children to internalize an identity shaped more by parental choices than by their own experiences, resulting in conflict between self-expression and inherited representations (Walrave et al., 2023; Zhang, 2025).

Digital Legacy, defined as the accumulation of online content about a person throughout their life (Doyle & Brubaker, 2023), can influence how individuals are perceived socially and professionally for years to come. When children have little agency over these representations, it may interfere with the development of an identity they feel ownership over (Walrave et al., 2023; Tartari et al., 2023).

Reflective parenting approaches enable children to have greater participation in managing their digital identities, promoting autonomy and personal growth (Senekal et al., 2022). Studies have shown that adverse outcomes associated with sharenting include discomfort in social settings, unwanted attention, and challenges with peers (Berg et al., 2024; Tartari et al., 2023). To address these challenges, researchers advocate for open family communication about digital presence and social media use. Educational efforts that raise awareness about privacy and ethical sharing practices may support healthier online behaviour and stronger identity development (Naab, 2019; Senekal et al., 2022).

Sharenting influences Erikson's stages of Autonomy, Industry, and Identity in multiple ways (Erikson, 1950). Reflective, collaborative parenting practices that emphasize children's rights and consent can help maintain opportunities for healthy psychosocial development in an increasingly digitized society. Having seen how sharenting may bottleneck a child's autonomy

and identity development, we now shift to a relational lens. Bowen Family Systems Theory illuminates how intergenerational emotional patterns and family differentiation shape and shaped by online sharing.

Bowen Family Systems Theory

Exploring the implications of sharenting through the lens of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) (Bowen, 1978) reveals layered dynamics within family relationships in the context of social media. BFST posits that families operate as emotional systems, where the behaviours and responses of individual members are interrelated and influence both psychological well-being and interpersonal functioning (Čepukienė, 2022). Using this framework, several concepts become central to understanding sharenting, including Differentiation of Self and Blurred Boundaries, the Family Projection Process and Emotional Reactivity, Triangulation and Public Audiences, Multigenerational Transmission and the Digital Legacy, as well as related ethical considerations.

Differentiation of Self and Blurred Boundaries

Differentiation of self is a central tenet of Bowen's theory (1978), referring to the ability of individuals to maintain autonomy while remaining emotionally connected to their families of origin. It allows for the integration of personal thoughts and feelings without being overwhelmed by family pressures (Bridge, 2019). When parents publicly share narratives about their children without consent, it can interfere with the development of a transparent and independent self-concept (Gotwald et al., 2024). This dynamic may drain emotional resources necessary for identity formation (Kim et al., 2013) and lead to difficulties in emotional regulation as children struggle to distinguish between their own identity and their public representation (Gotwald et al., 2024).

When parents share photos, stories, and experiences of their children online, they risk crossing the lines between their own identities and those of their children, which can hinder a child's ability to develop a distinct identity separate from the parameters defined by their parents. Children may come to associate their worth with how they are presented publicly by their parents, leading to a dependency on external validation (Gotwald et al., 2024).

A qualitative study by Peleg and colleagues (2025) conducted in-depth interviews with 31 adolescents aged 14 to 18. The research found that most participants felt ambivalent towards sharenting, feeling that their parents depict them in a more favourable light than they perceive themselves. While many participants appreciated the positive intentions behind their parents' posts, they also felt embarrassed, exposed, or misrepresented, particularly when content was shared without their consent. A key issue was the discrepancy between the digital identity they created for themselves, and the idealized version shown by their parents. The participants felt a lack of control over what was posted and a generational gap in platform use. They found that cultural differences also shaped responses. The Arab participants were more accepting of sharenting, which the researchers attributed to collectivist values and trust in parental authority, whereas the Jewish participants emphasized the importance of privacy and autonomy (Peleg et al., 2025).

Overexposure through sharenting can foster anxiety, particularly when children feel obligated to meet the expectations conveyed by parental portrayals (Gotwald et al., 2024). The degree to which parents share personal details can impact how children perceive themselves in relation to others, increasing the likelihood of developing low self-esteem and emotional distress (Čepukienė, 2022). Parents' motives for sharing, such as seeking validation or comparing

themselves to others, may further disrupt emotional boundaries within and outside the familial structure (Čepukienė, 2022).

The emotional outcome of such blurred boundaries can manifest as anxiety, confusion, and conflict as children navigate the dichotomy of their perceived online personas and their true selves. They often struggle with establishing healthy boundary settings, as their first exposure to identity formation is filtered through their parents' interpretations and public presentations of their lives (Ivantes-Rodrigues et al., 2025). Hence, the differentiation of self becomes challenged in a system where parental influence supersedes the child's emerging autonomy.

Family Projection Process and Emotional Reactivity

The Family Projection Process explains how parents may pass their emotional issues onto their children. Instead of resolving their own conflicts directly, parents may shift their tension onto the child, making the child the focus of their stress (Huang & Rohlfing, 2018). This often happens when parents are in conflict and, rather than addressing it with each other, they involve the child as a way to manage or avoid their own problems. This process can lead to emotional pressure on the child, reducing their ability to develop independently and increasing their risk for emotional or psychological difficulties (Bowen, 1978; Huang & Rohlfing, 2018). The projection can appear in various forms, such as excessive worry, criticism, or over-involvement, all of which can negatively affect the child's functioning and emotional well-being (Huang & Rohlfing, 2018). In the context of sharenting, this can manifest as an urge to control children's digital identities, reflecting parental concerns about social acceptance or competence (Čepukienė, 2022). This behaviour may lead to increased emotional reactivity, where the tension in the family amplifies the pressures of maintaining a curated public image.

When parents attempt to manage their anxieties through their children's online lives, they may inadvertently project their concerns about acceptance, perfectionism, and validation onto their children (Novianti et al., 2023). Children raised in these settings may feel pressure to meet unspoken expectations, which can limit authentic emotional expression. As children navigate these dynamics, they may struggle to express themselves authentically, instead opting to align with the images and narratives presented by their parents (Lampis, 2015).

Emotional reactivity tends to escalate when children internalize parental anxiety. When private experiences are shared publicly, children may feel powerless to assert agency, resulting in identity instability and difficulty forming healthy relationships, echoing Bowen's notion that family members' emotional states have a broad effect on the entire unit (Čepukienė, 2022).

Triangulation and Public Audiences

Bowen explains triangulation as a dynamic where two individuals experiencing tension bring in a third party to help ease the relational strain. This mechanism is a key component of how emotional systems handle stress and plays a central role in Bowen's broader family systems theory (Bowen, 1978). In the context of sharenting, the online audience can act as a third party in the parent-child dynamic. Parents may turn to social media for reassurance or validation instead of addressing concerns directly with their children. This can lead to children's experiences being publicly shared and interpreted by strangers, placing them in emotionally vulnerable positions (Gotwald et al., 2024; Lampis, 2015). As a result, children may feel emotionally distanced or like bystanders in their own narratives (Lampis, 2015).

When children see their parents post idealized images of them and their family online, they may find it hard to speak up about how they feel about it. This difficulty can perpetuate triangulated relationships where children feel unable to communicate their disagreement or

discomfort regarding their portrayal in public forums. Instead, these children may resort to conforming to the idealized image or emotionally withdrawing, both of which inhibit healthy family relational patterns. As this dynamic continues, it becomes increasingly difficult to resolve conflicts or foster closeness within the family (Čepukienė, 2022).

Multigenerational Transmission and the Digital Legacy

Bowen Family Systems Theory emphasizes multigenerational transmission processes, wherein learned behaviours and emotional patterns are passed down through generations (Keller, 2020). Parents who engage in sharenting behaviours create a digital legacy that defines their children's online presence for years.

Children who grow up in overexposed environments may replicate similar behaviours as adults. Lacking models of appropriate boundary-setting, they might struggle to define their own privacy or consent standards. The emotional imprint of sharenting may be carried into future relationships and parenting, repeating cycles of blurred boundaries and online dependency (Čepukienė, 2022).

This legacy shapes how children understand autonomy and consent. The narratives constructed by parents serve as reference points in the child's development, shaping the ways children approach consent, autonomy, and emotional honesty in their relationships. This often leads to a path where self-identity is compromised for the sake of public validation (Čepukienė, 2022).

Implications and Ethical Considerations

Sharenting presents ethical challenges, particularly about privacy and consent. Parents must consider whether their actions support or infringe upon a child's right to develop an identity free from external influence (Gotwald et al., 2024). Since children cannot offer fully informed

consent, the responsibility falls on parents to consider the long-term consequences of sharing personal content (Čepukienė, 2022).

The practice of sharenting often disregards the long-term emotional consequences it engenders, raising questions about the potential for emotional harm stemming from parental overexposure. Parents need to cultivate not only self-awareness regarding their motivations for sharing but also acute sensitivity to their children's evolving feelings toward being publicly represented. A failure to approach sharenting ethically can lead to emotional and relational harm, necessitating thoughtful discussions about consent and privacy within families as they navigate the intersection of social media and personal identity (Čepukienė, 2022).

Although many parents intend to share out of pride or connection, failing to reflect on the implications may result in emotional strain and relational tension. Thoughtful discussions around digital boundaries, privacy, and consent are necessary to safeguard children's well-being in online spaces (Čepukienė, 2022).

While Bowen's theory emphasizes the family's internal emotional architecture, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework directs our attention outward to social performance. In the next section, we will examine how parents and children alike create digital 'front stages' and manage their online reputations.

Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach

Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory offers a lens through which to examine the performative aspects of sharenting and family vlogging.

Goffman conceptualized social interaction as a theatrical performance, where individuals manage impressions by presenting themselves in ways that support their desired identities. In this

model, the "front stage" represents a curated, public-facing persona, while the "backstage" refers to a private space for preparation, reflection, and self-directed behaviour (Goffman, 1959).

Sharenting as Self-Representation

Holiday et al. (2020) argue that sharenting involves a deliberate form of self-representation, where children are often positioned as props in the performance of parental identity. In their analysis of Instagram content, they identified three types of sharenting: polished, promotional, and intimate. Polished posts display idealized aesthetics, showcase parenting achievements and milestones, and portray seemingly authentic moments of vulnerability. These align closely with Goffman's (1959) idea of impression management, whereby individuals selectively control the information they present to others to shape social perceptions.

In promotional posts, parents use social media to highlight their own skills, talents, or products, often as a way to build a brand or support a business. Unlike polished posts that try to appear effortless, promotional posts openly focus on the parents' skills and success. For example, a mother might post a photo of her child wearing handmade clothing she sewed, using the caption to link to her online shop. These posts are more focused on the parents' competence rather than the child; they are usually directed towards parents and reflect how social media has become a tool for parenting-related marketing and entrepreneurship (Holiday et al., 2020).

Holiday et al (2020) describe intimate posts as posts that show authentic family moments without trying to look perfect or present themselves as expert caregivers. These types of posts aim to memorialize honest, real-life moments; they feel personal and unfiltered, unlike polished posts. The photos and captions together show how the parent

lived through or made sense of a specific moment. These images often highlight themes like personal sacrifice, belonging to a community, and pushing through hardship.

In their qualitative study, Fox et al. (2022) found that first-time fathers engaged in sharenting to affirm their role as involved parents despite having privacy concerns. Even while acknowledging risks, participants shared content to demonstrate engagement, reinforcing their social identity. This paradox reflects the tension between the desire for privacy and the perceived benefits of online recognition, further illustrating sharenting as a performance (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024).

The Dramaturgical Elements of Sharenting

In Goffman's theory, the setting includes the physical or symbolic environment in which the performance takes place. For sharenting, digital platforms become the primary stage. The visual elements of a post, backgrounds, captions, and props function as a symbolic setting that enhances the credibility of the parental performance (D'Amico, 2022). Guardians who participate in sharenting often curate these elements to depict competence, warmth, and domestic harmony, aligning with culturally idealized notions of parenthood (Abidin, 2017).

Appearance encompasses all the stimuli that convey information about the actor's social status and identity (Goffman, 1959). In sharenting, both the parent's and child's appearances are deliberately chosen. These parents often select images that reflect parenting values, emotional tone, and social norms. D'Amico (2022) found that participants carefully designed Facebook posts to align with either introspective or outward-focused portrayals, using visual elements to create a believable digital identity.

Mannerisms are the interactional style by which individuals perform their roles (Goffman, 1959). On social media, this includes how parents respond to comments, use emojis

and hashtags, and engage with their audience. Lowe-Calverley and Grieve (2018) argue that social media activity functions as a symbolic form of interaction, where likes, shares, and comments reinforce the performance. D'Amico (2022) observed that mothers develop distinct online mannerisms based on their beliefs and social expectations, thereby reinforcing the credibility of their digital performance.

Front Stage and Backstage Dynamics

Goffman (1959) distinguishes between front stage behaviour, which is visible, controlled, and aligned with societal expectations, and backstage behaviour, which is private, preparatory, and potentially inconsistent with the performed identity. Sharenting thrives on the front stage, where parents present carefully curated versions of family life. However, some attempts are made to incorporate backstage content through posts that appear candid or vulnerable (Abidin, 2015; Abidin, 2017). According to Holiday et al. (2020), even so-called authentic sharenting often serves a performative purpose, maintaining the impression of closeness or resilience.

This duality creates a performative tension. Hassan (2022) and Fox et al. (2022) note that even when parents express awareness of privacy concerns and acknowledge past traumas related to sharenting, they continue sharing due to social pressure and the rewards associated with visibility. As digital content is preserved and circulated, even personal moments become part of the ongoing performance.

Performance Teams and Children's Role

A central concept in Goffman's (1959) theory is that social life is a performance made out of teams: a group that collaborates to maintain a specific impression. These teams are formed by participants on both the backstage and front stages. In sharenting, children often function as co-performers, lacking agency or informed consent. Parents, particularly mothers, act as both stars

and directors, orchestrating the children's roles to maintain a coherent narrative (D'Amico, 2022).

Abidin (2017) introduces the concept of "calibrated amateurism," where family influencers construct content that appears to depict spontaneous everyday life but is carefully managed and planned. D'Amico (2022) observed that some mothers intentionally posted humorous or flawed moments to appear relatable. These moments often enhanced the overall believability of their image rather than undermining it. In these situations, children may take on the role of digital labourers, contributing to the family's public identity and, in some cases, to monetized content. The family is not performing alone. The audience, sponsors, and platform algorithms all play a part in shaping what is presented and rewarded.

Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management is useful in explaining how parents navigate the tension between portraying perfection and appearing authentic. They must balance the "front stage" performance of ideal parenthood with the desire to be seen as relatable and real, revealing selective "backstage" moments without undermining their credibility.

Role Conflict

Sharenting reflects Goffman's (1959) theory that individuals shape their behaviour to meet societal norms and audience expectations (Jin et al., 2022). Despite expressing concerns about digital privacy, many parents prioritize social validation and identity reinforcement over minimizing risks (Fox et al., 2022; Ranzini et al., 2020). In this context, sharenting becomes a form of impression management that aligns with the ideals of modern parenthood.

While parents often use social media to present an idealized version of family life, Goffman's (1959) concept of role conflict can also help explain the tensions involved. For instance, parents may experience conflict between their role as protectors of their children's

privacy and their role as socially engaged individuals seeking connection and approval online. These competing expectations can shape how and what they choose to share.

Positive feedback, such as likes and comments, serves as a form of social validation, reinforcing these behaviours. The ongoing desire to be seen as competent, loving, and engaged parents continues to fuel sharenting, even in the face of ethical or privacy concerns (Briazu et al., 2021; Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019).

Children's Perspectives on Sharenting

Through focus group research, Ouvrein and Verswijvel (2019) found that adolescents want control over how they are depicted online. While some of them enjoyed their family posting the occasional celebratory posts, others felt embarrassed or objectified by it altogether. These reactions suggest that the parent's portrayal may not align with the child's developing self-image or preferences.

Lipu and Siibak (2019) reported that children often experience frustration when their preferences are ignored, which can lead to familial tension. In Goffman's terms, this creates a conflict between the child's preferred self-presentation and the parental script, threatening the coherence of the performance. The resulting tension exposes the inherently relational and sometimes coercive nature of sharenting.

The Legal and Moral Imperative

Steinberg (2017) offers one of the earliest legal analyses of sharenting, arguing that parents serve as both narrators and gatekeepers of children's digital identities, which can leave children vulnerable, especially when their personal information is shared without their knowledge or consent. Steinberg makes a strong case for shifting how we think about children's privacy; they argue that sharenting should not just be left to individual parents to manage but

treated more like a public health concern. She calls for legal and ethical frameworks that prioritize the child's rights and long-term well-being over the parent's impulse or freedom to share.

Tartari et al. (2023) used virtual ethnography to observe how families in different cultural settings negotiate rules regarding child-related content and how they balance online and offline norms related to child content. They observed two parenting Facebook groups, one in the UK and one in Italy, and found that culture plays a large role in how and what parents choose to share. In both, groups, most of the postings were by mothers dealing with the challenges of early parenting and seeking help and connection in these communities. Tartari et al. (2023) found that while many parents were aware of the potential harms associated with sharenting, such as compromising their child's privacy or creating an unwanted digital footprint, they often weighed these risks against the immediate benefits of emotional support and guidance. The UK parents were more open to sharenting; they were more likely to share detailed personal information, including detailed stories, photos, and videos of their children, reflecting a more open approach to sharenting. While Italian parents tended to be more cautious, sharing less personal information, keeping their posts more anonymous and private. They showed a greater concern for privacy, which was shaped in part by national anxieties around online risks and child protection. This study suggests that local parenting norms, narratives in media, and broader cultural values shape how parents navigate sharenting, and the need for ongoing conversations when it comes to balancing openness with protection.

Interventions

After reviewing theoretical frameworks that help conceptualize how sharenting and family vlogging affect children's development, identity, and relationships, it becomes necessary

to consider models that support families in addressing these concerns. While Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Bowen Family Systems Theory, and Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach offers insights into how digital exposure shapes childhood experiences, intervention programs help translate these ideas into practical strategies. This section examines psychoeducational and therapeutic approaches, including Circle of Security Parenting, Emotion-Focused Family Therapy, Mindful Parenting, and psychoeducation, that support caregivers navigating digital-age parenting.

Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P)

Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P) is an attachment-based intervention designed to enhance caregivers' ability to recognize and respond appropriately to children's emotional needs. Rooted in Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory and extended through the work of Cooper, Hoffman, Powell, and Marvin (2009), COS-P presents a visual "Circle" map of the parent-child relationship that illustrates the child's need for exploration, comfort, and emotional regulation. Theoretical contributions from Bowlby (1958; 1979) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) emphasize that secure attachment is built upon a caregiver's capacity for sensitivity, emotional availability, and consistent presence, all of which are core elements of COS-P.

The Circle of Security Parenting Framework

COS-P encourages parents to be "bigger, stronger, wiser, and kind" (Cooper et al., 2009) by supporting their children's coinciding needs for autonomy and comfort. Using visual metaphors like the secure base and safe haven, COS-P aims to enhance caregiver sensitivity, co-regulation, and emotional availability (Kim et al., 2018; Topham, 2018). The approach encourages recognition of emotional cues and helps parents reflect on their own attachment histories and emotional patterns (Maxwell et al., 2021). COS-P builds on attachment research,

which shows that children with disorganized or insecure attachment are at greater risk for behavioural, emotional, and cognitive challenges (Fearon et al., 2010; Yahlkoski et al., 2016). These risks highlight the urgency of interventions like COS-P, particularly for vulnerable families.

A central feature of COS-P is the concept of "Being-With," referring to a caregiver's ability to remain emotionally present and attuned to a child's internal experience (Cooper et al., 2017). This presence supports emotional regulation, trust, and resilience. The therapist's "Being-With" stance also models emotional containment for the caregiver, supporting intergenerational healing (Cooper et al., 2017).

The Circle of Security graphic (See Appendix A) helps caregivers conceptualize the child's need for both autonomy and connection, aiding in the recognition of "miscues", which are indirect signals children may send when their needs are not clearly expressed (Yahlkoski et al., 2016). This visual tool supports the development of reflective functioning, enabling caregivers to understand and respond to their child's emotional experiences, which has been linked to secure attachment and improved emotional regulation (Røhder et al., 2022; Yahlkoski et al., 2016).

Empirical research reports that COS-P reduces caregiver stress, improves emotional availability, and enhances parents' ability to reflect on their children's needs (Kohlhoff et al., 2016; Maxwell et al., 2021; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021). The program has improved maternal sensitivity in mothers with unresolved attachment (Ramsauer et al., 2019), and has been associated with stronger mother-infant bonding and reduced parenting stress among mothers with perinatal depression (Richards, 2021). The COS-P approach helped increased parental empathy, confidence, and self-efficacy (Maxwell et al., 2021; Savela et al., 2025). While results

vary, some studies demonstrate reductions in children's emotional and behavioural difficulties (Bikic et al., 2022; Krishnamoorthy et al., 2020).

Despite these promising outcomes, evidence on whether COS-P directly improves attachment security remains inconclusive. Some studies report limited or no significant changes in child attachment security, parental stress, or behavioural outcomes (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021; Gerdts-Andresen, 2021). The program's effectiveness may depend on the setting, delivery method, and population. For example, COS-P shows promise in child protective services, perinatal mental health contexts, and with caregivers of children facing developmental challenges (Helle et al., 2022; Cook et al., 2021; Yaholkoski et al., 2016). However, long-term effects remain understudied.

Performance and Presence

Sharenting often emphasizes external validation and public perception, sometimes at the expense of emotional connection. The curated nature of social media can prompt parents to focus on capturing idealized moments rather than being emotionally present with their children (Caruana, 2016). COS-P directly counters this dynamic by emphasizing presence, emotional engagement, and containment during both distress and joy (Kim et al., 2018). This shift from performance to presence supports the development of secure internal working models in children (Cooper et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2018).

Sharenting can come between an authentic parent-child relationship by projecting a digital image that may not align with the child's lived experience. COS-P helps parents become more reflective about their behaviours and motivations, encouraging them to prioritize connection over curation. This reflective stance is crucial in preventing the replacement of real-

time caregiving with performative parenting behaviours that often drive sharenting (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021).

Røhder et al. (2022) note that parental sensitivity, known as the ability to accurately perceive, interpret, and respond to a child's cues, is a key component in fostering secure attachment. COS-P helps address these issues by enhancing parents' reflective functioning, helping them to regulate their emotions better and understand their child's emotional needs (Røhder et al., 2022).

Emotional availability is central to COS-P, yet sharenting behaviour often stems from social comparison, leading to increased parental stress and diminished self-efficacy. Parents who compare themselves to others online may feel pressure to conform to idealized parenting standards, which can undermine their responsiveness and sensitivity (Bayraktar & Çelik, 2025). COS-P helps to resist this pressure by enhancing self-reflection and reducing the need for public validation (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021). Although studies do not conclusively show that COS-P improves attachment security, reductions in negative parenting practices and increases in Parental efficacy provides indirect support for healthier attachment environments (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021).

Digital Identity Construction

Sharenting can result in the premature and involuntary construction of a child's digital identity. Parents often act as narrators of their children's lives, potentially compromising the child's future autonomy and digital agency (Steinberg, 2017). As children age, they may object to having personal moments publicly archived, particularly if these posts are monetized or tied to influencer branding (Zhu et al., 2025).

COS-P contrasts sharply with this practice by emphasizing that children are individuals with emotional needs and boundaries. It promotes a caregiving stance rooted in respect, containment, and the child's lived emotional reality (Topham, 2018). From a COS-P perspective, sharing a child's life online without consent may constitute a breach of the safe haven that caregivers are meant to provide. Rather than projecting the child as an extension of the parent, COS-P encourages recognition of the child as a separate individual deserving of privacy and psychological safety (Maxwell et al., 2021).

Ethics

Sharenting raises ethical concerns about psychological ownership and the commodification of children's personal lives. Parents may feel entitled to share content because they see it as "theirs," overlooking the child's right to privacy and autonomy (Cai, 2023). Legal protections for children's digital rights remain underdeveloped, increasing risks such as identity theft and cyberbullying (Serna, 2024). Caregivers are taught to acknowledge their projections and unmet emotional needs and to instead prioritize the child's emotional experience (Caruana, 2016). This aligns with Steinberg's (2017) call for a public health framework that centers on children's autonomy and rights.

Dismissing or invalidating parenting behaviours have been linked to internalizing symptoms and emotional dysregulation in adolescents (Buckholdt et al., 2013; Di Giunta et al., 2022). Notably, research shows that parental presence can buffer against behavioural and neurological dysregulation in insecurely attached youth, further underscoring the value of interventions like COS-P that promote consistent and attuned caregiving (Rogers et al., 2021).

Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT)

Emotion-focused family therapy (EFFT), founded by Dr. Adele Lafrance and Joanne Dolhanty, (Lafrance, et al., 2020) is grounded in humanistic, attachment, and systems theories. The approach suggests that emotional difficulties within families often originate from unresolved emotional blocks and disruptions in caregiving relationships (Quinn et al., 2023; Efron, 2004). Core aims of EFFT include developing parents' emotional coaching abilities, addressing emotional blocks in caregivers, and restoring secure attachment bonds (Greenberg, 2010; Pascual-Leone & Greenberg, 2020).

EFFT frames problematic parenting behaviours within a non-pathologizing, developmental lens, treating them as signs of emotional disconnection rather than intrinsic flaws (Bloch & Guillory, 2011). This approach has shown particular effectiveness with parents of adolescents experiencing mental health challenges, helping them re-engage their caregiving instincts through techniques such as the two-chair intervention (Sabey et al., 2022). In this method, therapists guide caregivers in exploring internal conflicts and addressing self-critical tendencies, often transforming feelings like shame into more adaptive responses such as protective anger or compassion (Stiegler, 2018).

Emotion-focused approaches rest on four guiding principles: emotional awareness, regulation, reflection, and transformation (Greenberg, 2017). These processes help parents better understand their own emotions and more effectively support their children's emotional experiences (Sun, 2016). EFFT encourages caregivers to act as emotional coaches during times of psychological distress (Robinson et al., 2015). Rather than focusing on outward indicators of parenting success, EFFT promotes affective attunement, urging parents to look inward and

respond to their children's emotional needs, instead of curating an idealized image for external validation (Conradi et al., 2023).

EFFT emphasizes that parents are the most effective agents of emotional healing for their children (Lafrance et al., 2020). This stance empowers caregivers to take an active role in supporting their loved ones, even when they face their own emotional challenges. Central to this philosophy is the model's "no blame" approach, which helps caregivers move away from self-criticism and toward self-compassion by reframing past mistakes within the context of limited internal and external resources (Lafrance et al., 2020).

Emotional Roots and Relational Impacts

Sharenting has become increasingly prevalent across social media platforms digital, with research indicates that approximately 81% of children in Western countries have a digital footprint before their second birthday, with rates as high as 92% in the United States (Ferrara et al., 2023; Keith & Steinberg, 2017). Many of these "digital births" begin in infancy, with one-third of babies having their images or information shared online just weeks after birth (Ferrara et al., 2023). Parents often cite motives such as documentation, community connection, and identity expression when posting about their children (Latipah et al., 2020; Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024).

Sharenting may reflect underlying emotional vulnerabilities. Research shows that parents who engage in frequent sharenting often compare themselves to others and may experience feelings of inadequacy (Bayraktar & Çelik, 2025). From an EFFT perspective, these behaviours signal emotional gaps, particularly shame and fear-based defences, which are viewed as key intervention points (Sabey et al., 2021). Some parents may turn to social media as a coping mechanism, using online platforms to manage insecurities or relational anxieties (Novianti et al., 2023). EFFT addresses this by helping caregivers explore and release narratives of self-blame

that can otherwise create harmful relational cycles and reduce their capacity for emotional support (Lafrance et al., 2020).

Emotional blocks such as guilt, shame, and fear can inhibit effective caregiving. EFFT prioritizes addressing these blocks. Techniques like the two-chair intervention are particularly helpful for confronting internalized self-criticism. In these sessions, parents engage in imagined dialogues with parts of themselves and their child to access, clarify, and work through difficult emotions, ultimately increasing awareness and emotional resolution (Sabey et al., 2022; Lafrance et al., 2020). This process strengthens emotional availability and reduces the need for external validation (Sabey et al., 2021; Foroughe et al., 2023).

Sharenting practices, especially those that reveal intimate or distressing details of the child's life, can reflect an unmet parental need for validation that overshadows the child's right to privacy (Meliani et al., 2023). In such cases, children may be relegated from relational subjects to objects of digital content. EFFT views this as a form of relational misattunement, where adult emotions are prioritized over the child's emotional experience (Meliani et al., 2023).

Sharenting may also reveal enmeshed family dynamics, where parents over-identify with their children or unconsciously rely on them to meet emotional needs (Conradi et al., 2023). EFFT helps clarify these boundaries by guiding parents to see their child as an autonomous individual with a distinct emotional world. When children express discomfort about being featured online, therapists support parents in validating these feelings and working collaboratively to establish respectful boundaries. This therapeutic process mirrors the privacy negotiation observed in studies on mindful sharenting (Walrave et al., 2023). As children become more aware of their digital presence and begin to voice their discomfort, parents are encouraged to reassess how and what they share online. This process often requires a shift in mindset, from

seeing the child as an extension of the parent to recognizing them as a separate person with their own digital boundaries and emotional needs. In these moments, therapists help families navigate challenging conversations and establish new norms that feel respectful to everyone involved (Walrave et al., 2023).

Digital Boundaries

Sharenting can blur the boundaries around personal and emotional space, particularly when children's private moments and milestones are shared online without their consent. Scholars have warned about the rise of the "datafied child," whose digital identity is shaped by parents rather than by the children themselves (Siibak & Traks, 2019).

From an EFFT standpoint, such behaviour may reflect unresolved emotional needs in caregivers and a breakdown of appropriate boundaries. Emotional intrusions occur when a parent's need for affirmation or expression overrides a child's need for privacy and autonomy (Cai, 2023). Therapy focuses on increasing caregiver awareness of these patterns and fostering more reflective parenting practices (Sun, 2016). This includes helping families co-create digital boundary agreements and involving children in decisions about their online presence to promote trust and respect (Conradi et al., 2023).

Repairing Ruptures and Rebuilding Trust

EFFT emphasizes the importance of emotional boundaries in fostering trust and safety within the family system (Greenberg, 2010). Sharenting frequently violates these boundaries, exposing private emotional moments for public consumption and potentially creating an attachment rupture. Children of parents who have engaged in sharenting and are now adults report feeling resentment and a sense of betrayal, as they believe their autonomy was compromised (Cansızlar & Şahin, 2025).

EFFT offers tools for repairing such ruptures. This includes acknowledging harm, engaging in open, non-defensive dialogue, and expressing sincere regret. One of EFFT's most impactful repair strategies is the therapeutic apology, in which caregivers take responsibility for their role in relational harm, either through role-play or direct conversation (Lafrance et al., 2020). This process supports the child's healing while helping caregivers release harmful self-blame and rebuild connection (Robinson et al., 2016; Sabey et al., 2021).

One of EFFT's strengths is its ability to facilitate corrective emotional experiences, instances where caregivers respond in new, emotionally attuned ways. These moments can help children feel valued and safe, even after previous relational injuries (Greenberg, 2010). Corrective experiences require the parent to step into the child's perspective, affirm the child's feelings about prior relational ruptures and adjust behaviours accordingly (Smith et al., 2023).

Early patterns of parent-child interaction, especially attachment-related dynamics, are foundational to child development, and disruptions in these early relationships can influence emotional patterns across the lifespan (Wilhelmsen-Langeland et al., 2019). Emotion coaching in EFFT is considered an advanced caregiving skill that supports children in regulating distress, reducing reactivity, and developing internal resources for emotional resilience (Lafrance et al., 2020).

Long-term healing also relies on emotional literacy, the ability to regulate and reflect on emotions. EFFT teaches this skill through experiential learning, guided dialogue, and emotion coaching techniques (Pascual-Leone & Greenberg, 2020). Promoting emotional literacy is crucial in preventing future relational ruptures and enabling parents to recognize and manage the fears and insecurities that fuel sharenting. Children also benefit from learning how to voice boundaries and understand their reactions to online exposure (Robinson et al., 2015).

Educational and therapeutic programs based on EFFT principles could integrate digital parenting modules. These programs can help families co-create online boundaries and discuss the implications collaboratively and respectfully (Williams-Ceci et al., 2021).

Neurobiology and EFFT

EFFT incorporates neurobiological research to emphasize how attuned caregiving influences a child's nervous system. When caregivers respond with compassion, children experience neurological signals of safety facilitated by the oxytocin system, which helps deactivate stress responses and foster a sense of emotional security (Hughes & Baylin, 2012; Lafrance et al., 2020). Educational and therapeutic programs based on EFFT could incorporate digital literacy components, enabling families to collaboratively define appropriate sharing practices (Williams-Ceci et al., 2021).

Emotion-Focused Family Therapy offers a compassionate approach to addressing the emotional dynamics that underlie sharenting. By targeting shame, fear, and validation-seeking behaviours (Sabey et al., 2022; Stiegler, 2018), EFFT helps caregivers deepen their emotional awareness (Sun, 2016), strengthen boundaries (Conradi et al., 2023), and re-establish attuned connections with their children (Greenberg, 2010; Robinson et al., 2015). In an age where digital sharing is nearly ubiquitous (Ferrara et al., 2023), EFFT equips families with the tools to navigate these challenges thoughtfully and relationally. When applied to the context of sharenting, EFFT not only facilitates healing and repair (Smith et al., 2023; Robinson et al., 2016) but also empowers parents and children to co-create a future grounded in mutual respect, emotional safety, and trust (Walrave et al., 2023; Williams-Ceci et al., 2021).

Mindful Parenting

Mindful parenting is a caregiving approach grounded in mindfulness, encouraging parents to bring non-judgmental awareness, emotional regulation, and compassionate presence into their interactions with children. It emphasizes intentional responses over impulsive reactions and prioritizes the emotional and developmental needs of the child in everyday parenting decisions (Duncan et al., 2009). Therefore, mindful parenting offers a promising intervention for addressing the ethical and psychological challenges posed by sharenting.

Mindful parenting incorporates mindfulness principles, including intentionality, present-moment awareness, emotional regulation, and compassionate attention, into the caregiving relationship (Duncan et al., 2009). This model encourages parents to respond to their children with awareness and sensitivity, rather than reacting from stress or habit (Duncan et al., 2009). Bögels et al. (2010) suggest that mindful parenting improves parenting outcomes by reducing stress, interrupting reactive behaviour cycles, and fostering emotional attunement. These principles naturally extend to digital contexts, including how parents approach the online documentation of family life.

Jon Kabat-Zinn and Myla Kabat-Zinn (2021) emphasize that mindful parenting is not about striving for perfection but about nurturing an attuned and reflective relationship with one's child. This conscious parenting style offers a steady counterpoint to the impulsiveness and performative pressure that often come with sharing online. Mindful parenting encourages parents to pause and consider not just what they are posting but also why they are posting it and what it means for their child in the long run. In this way, it becomes a useful lens for thinking through the ethics of sharenting and for shaping a more thoughtful, respectful approach to parenting in the digital world.

Mindful Sharenting: A Hybrid Concept

Walrave et al. (2023) introduced the concept of "mindful sharenting" which refers to the intentional and cautious sharing of children's images or information by parents on social media, with the aim of protecting the child's privacy while still engaging in online social life. This practice emerges in response to growing concerns about the risks of sharenting such as identity theft, digital exploitation, and the shaping of children's online identity without their consent (Walrave et al., 2023).

Mindful sharenting draws inspiration from the concept of mindful parenting, through the two practices are distinct. Mindful parenting is concerned with present-moment awareness, emotional responsiveness, and value-based guidance in direct parent-child interactions. While mindful sharenting emphasizes emotional connection and awareness in everyday parenting, mindful sharenting centers on the ethical and privacy-related considerations of a child's digital presence (Walrave et al., 2023). Parents who engage in mindful sharenting are aware of the consequences their online actions might have for their child now and in the future. They want to allow their children the freedom to construct their own online identities when they get older (Walrave et al., 2023).

Walrave et al. (2023) conducted in-depth interviews with eight mother and father dyads born between 1980 and 2000 to explore parents' motivations for sharenting, what experiences influenced their decisions, what strategies parents used to protect their child's privacy, and how others react to sharenting. Pairs of parents to determine their motivations for sharenting

In the study by (Walrave et al. (2023), millennial parents reported being motivated by negative personal or observed experiences, such as unauthorized image use or exposure to inappropriate online environments. These parents adopted protective strategies, including

photographing their child from behind, using emojis to hide their faces, sharing only images that do not show their face, and limiting distribution through private groups and closed messaging apps. Such actions reflect a deliberate attempt to reduce the potential long-term effects of sharenting while still participating in digital communities.

The study by Walrave et al. (2023) also examines the motivations of millennial parents for practicing mindful sharenting and investigates how friends and family respond to these decisions. Findings show that while many parents are committed to mindful digital practices, they frequently encounter resistance or misunderstanding from relatives. The study reveals that mindful sharenting is not only about individual choice but also involves collective negotiation and boundary-setting, concepts that are also rooted in family systems and attachment theories (Walrave et al., 2023).

Parenting, Development, and Culture

Mindful parenting has broader implications for children's psychological and social development. Wong et al. (2019) found that mothers who practiced mindful parenting reported higher levels of prosocial behaviour in their children. Similarly, Akik (2023) showed that mindful parenting is associated with fewer behavioural problems and enhanced child mental health. These findings suggest that when applied to sharenting, mindfulness could help parents avoid digital behaviours that inadvertently undermine their children's emotional development or sense of agency.

This relational security, fostered through mindful attention, may serve as a buffer when children begin to question and process their digital presence. As Ahemaitijiang et al. (2021) argue, mindful parenting reduces the transmission of stress from parent to child and supports healthy attachment, a critical protective factor in today's digitally saturated environment.

Self-compassion in mindful parenting is also crucial; Moreira et al. (2016) and Gouveia et al. (2016) found that parents who had higher self-compassion reported lower stress and greater emotional availability. These attributes can help parents resist external pressures to overshare and instead adopt digital behaviours aligned with their child's emotional and developmental needs. Thus, mindful parenting operates not only as a relational tool but also as a digital intervention against unconscious or socially pressured sharenting.

Applying mindful parenting in the digital world encourages parents to practice more intentional and ethically grounded sharenting. Mindful parenting encourages parents to slow down, reflect, and make online choices that align with values such as awareness, empathy, and respect. Parents who take this approach are more attuned to the risks of oversharing and more committed to protecting their children's sense of agency. Many also push back against social pressures that normalize constant online visibility (Walrave et al., 2023). As Walrave et al. (2023) suggest, parents employ specific strategies, such as obscuring faces or limiting audience reach, to balance their desire to share with the need to safeguard privacy. In doing so, they not only reduce potential harm but also set an example for their children and others about what responsible digital behaviour can look like.

The Privacy Paradox

Despite concern about online privacy, many parents paradoxically engage in high frequency sharenting. Ní Bhroin et al. (2022) describe this as the "privacy paradox by proxy." Even when parents are aware of the risks involved in sharing about their children online, they often continue to do so because of the emotional or social gratification it brings. Unfortunately, knowing better does not always mean that they will do better. This is where mindful parenting

can make a difference, helping parents slow down, reflect on their choices, and align their actions more closely with their values.

Briazu et al. (2021) provide further evidence that even when mothers of young children are aware of long-term digital risks, psychosocial variables such as social anxiety and emotional vulnerability drive them to share regardless. Mindful parenting may offer a path forward by helping parents regulate digital impulses and prioritize their children's well-being.

Ethical Decision-Making

Each step of the sharenting process, photographing, captioning, uploading, and monitoring, represents a decision point. Meliani et al. (2023) argue that these actions are neither neutral nor unethical but rather ethical moments that can either support or violate a child's rights.

Putri et al. (2021) draw a helpful distinction between what they call "good" and "bad" sharenting, framing it not only around the act of sharing itself but the intent behind it and the impact it has on the child. Mindful parenting offers a useful lens for making thoughtful choices grounded in care, respect, and a commitment to child-centred values.

Damkjaer (2018) critiques how traditional sharenting often casts children as passive figures in stories told about them rather than with them. In contrast, mindful parenting encourages parents to center the child's perspective and honour their voice and dignity in the process. As Hassan (2022) suggests, one meaningful way to do this is by involving children in decisions about their digital presence, an approach that models consent, mutual respect, and the beginnings of digital autonomy.

Psychoeducation as an Intervention for Sharenting

Psychoeducation, defined as the structured provision of information and support to help individuals and families understand and cope with psychological and behavioural challenges, is

increasingly recognized as an effective and adaptable intervention to support families navigating complex issues (Lukens & McFarlane, 2004), including those posed by sharenting.

Psychoeducation involves the structured dissemination of information, guidance, and support to help individuals and families understand and manage psychological, behavioural, or developmental issues (Lukens & McFarlane, 2004). This approach integrates education with therapeutic goals, helping parents, children, and educators to make informed decisions and develop healthier relational patterns.

The effectiveness of psychoeducation has been demonstrated across various contexts. For instance, it has been shown to reduce parental expressed emotion and enhance family functioning among children with learning disorders (Uslu et al., 2006), as well as improve social skills and clinical outcomes for children diagnosed with ADHD (Syed et al., 2024; Montoya et al., 2011). Among new parents, psychoeducational programs have supported smoother transitions to parenthood and increased parenting sensitivity (Petch & Halford, 2008; Halford & Petch, 2010). In therapeutic settings, psychoeducation promotes parent engagement, particularly in treatments for disruptive behaviours (Martinez et al., 2017).

Psychoeducational interventions can be tailored to enhance parents' digital literacy, increase awareness of online risks, and promote ethical and respectful sharing practices. These programs equip parents with practical strategies and reflective tools to safeguard their children's digital privacy and emotional well-being, reinforcing the parent-child relationship in both online and offline environments (Brown et al., 2020; Shoval et al., 2022).

Studies consistently show that psychoeducational interventions can reduce parents' tendencies to overshare online. Williams-Ceci et al. (2021) found that while a brief informational video alone had limited impact, a video followed by written reflection significantly reduced

parents' intent to share both sensitive and benign child-related content. This corresponds with Isaac-Greene's (2025) pilot study, in which a one-hour psychoeducation workshop resulted in an 18% decrease in self-reported sharenting and a 22% increase in privacy-conscious behaviours. Williams-Ceci et al. (2021) and Isaac-Greene (2025) found that active engagement is more effective in motivating behavioural change.

Raising Risk Awareness Through Digital Literacy

A primary function of psychoeducation is to raise awareness about the risks associated with sharenting. Studies suggest that targeted psychoeducation can improve parents' awareness and management of digital privacy risks (Williams-Ceci et al., 2021; Zhang-Kennedy et al., 2017). Many parents underestimate the potential for their online posts to compromise their children's safety, both online and offline, and to cause future emotional distress (Conti et al., 2024; Ferrara et al., 2023). Research indicates that parents frequently have a distorted perception of who can access their posts, resulting in what scholars refer to as the "audience problem" (Barnes & Potter, 2020). This problem stems from context collapse, a term coined by Marwick and Boyd (2011) to describe how social media collapses multiple audiences, like friends, family, acquaintances, and strangers, blending into one, making it difficult for parents to gauge the actual reach of shared content, and challenging for users to tailor content appropriately. (Barnes & Potter, 2020; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). As a result, parents may believe they are sharing content with a small, trusted circle when, in reality, their posts can be seen by unintended or even potentially harmful viewers. This misjudgment of audience reach increases the risk of privacy violations, emotional harm, and misuse of children's data or images (Barnes & Potter, 2020; Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

To address this challenge, Amon et al. (2022) suggest the use of psychoeducational tools, such as "privacy nudges" or platform-specific tutorials, that can help parents visualize post visibility. Privacy nudges are subtle prompts or design features embedded into digital platforms that encourage users to reflect on the potential impact and audience of their posts before sharing. These "privacy nudges" can look like pop-up messages, warnings, or previews that simulate the reach of a post or the audience it might attract. Interventions that simulate audience reach or provide real-life cautionary stories can help facilitate the connection between perceived and actual exposure (Amon et al., 2022), enabling parents to make more informed and intentional decisions about sharing.

Digital literacy, which includes instrumental, informational, and social competencies (Barnes & Potter, 2020; Sonck et al., 2011), is foundational to psychoeducation. Parents with high digital literacy are more adept at adjusting privacy settings, evaluating the risks of sharing, and predicting who will view their posts (Harnum & Pinariya, 2023; Barnes & Potter, 2020). Research suggests that these digital competencies are not evenly distributed, particularly among older parents, parents with limited digital exposure, or families from marginalized communities, highlighting the need for targeted educational interventions (Livingstone, 2020; Barnes & Potter, 2020).

Promoting Responsible Sharing through Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation can be used to foster more deliberate and respectful sharing behaviours. Walrave et al. (2023) describe how informed parents can adopt privacy-preserving strategies, such as blurring faces, omitting names, or cropping out identifiers, to protect their children's identities. Parents with greater digital literacy are more likely to engage in these practices and consider their child's consent (Harnum & Pinariya, 2023; Rubinelli & Diviani, 2025).

Conti et al. (2024) highlight that children, even from a young age, value involvement in decisions about their digital presence. Their study found that children aged 4 to 17 preferred to be consulted before content about them was posted online. These findings underscore that psychoeducational programs should not only teach parents about consent in theory but also provide age-appropriate strategies for involving children in digital decision-making (Conti et al., 2024).

Psychoeducational interventions are not limited to technical tips. They encourage ethical reflection on children's rights, including the right to privacy, consent, and a digital identity free from exploitation (Adawiah & Rachmawati, 2021; Steinberg, 2017). Adawiah and Rachmawati (2021) argue that privacy must be treated as a core parenting value, akin to respect and emotional safety. Their work proposes ethical guidelines, including seeking children's consent, avoiding the posting of embarrassing content, respecting children's wishes, and refraining from online comments or interactions that could lead to bullying or interpersonal conflict.

Rubinelli and Diviani (2025) emphasize that digital footprints can shape future opportunities for children, including school admissions and employment. Psychoeducation should, therefore, include reflective exercises on long-term consequences and encourage parents to ask, "Will this post still feel appropriate in 10 years?"

Sharenting Awareness in Parenting Programs

Evidence from parenting programs suggests that psychoeducation about digital behaviours can be embedded within broader frameworks for child protection. Psychoeducational programs that improve parents' emotional regulation, positive discipline, and communication skills have been shown to reduce child maltreatment and improve child outcomes (Adawiah & Rachmawati, 2021). These programs are well-positioned to include sharenting-specific content,

such as guidance on privacy policies and location data, as well as avoiding overly personal content (Steinberg, 2017).

Livingstone and Byrne (2018) argue that digital parenting must evolve with children's development, emphasizing autonomy, positive role modelling, and consistent digital boundaries. Their framework is based on the World Health Organization's (2007) five parenting pillars: forming emotional bonds, regulating behaviour, respecting individuality, modelling positive behaviour, and ensuring provision and protection. These pillars provide a holistic approach to child-rearing that, when applied to digital contexts, encourages parents to be both digitally competent and emotionally available (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018). Psychoeducation is not only about preventing harm but also about modelling digital citizenship and fostering mutual respect in online contexts.

Boundary Setting Psychoeducation

An essential yet underemphasized dimension of psychoeducation in the context of sharenting is boundary setting. Educating parents on how to establish and maintain digital boundaries with their children supports both privacy and healthy family communication. Adawiah and Rachmawati (2021) point out that parents should think carefully about what they share online, taking into account whether the content is appropriate for public view, whether their child agrees with their shared content, and how online reactions, like comments, could affect their child. Their work stresses the need for clearer digital boundaries that reflect both care and respect. Building on this, Conti et al. (2024) found that many children want to be asked before anything about them is posted, suggesting that children's consent shouldn't just be a legal formality but a regular part of family communication around technology. Together, these studies reflect a broader shift toward including children's voices in decisions about their digital presence.

Livingstone and Byrne (2018) further connect boundary setting to the World Health Organization's (2007) parenting pillars, particularly those focused on behavioural regulation and respect for individuality, framing digital boundary setting as a natural extension of positive parenting (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018). Incorporating boundary-setting guidance into psychoeducational programs not only reduces the risks of oversharing but also encourages respectful, age-appropriate digital habits that can evolve alongside a child's development.

Training Practitioners and Systems-Level Integration

To scale psychoeducation effectively, professionals who work with families, such as pediatricians, teachers, and counsellors, must be equipped with evidence-based knowledge of sharenting. Stormer et al. (2023) argue for practitioner training that is culturally sensitive and alliance-building, helping families navigate sharenting without shame or blame. Similarly, Ferrara et al. (2023) and Conti et al. (2024) emphasize the important role of healthcare professionals in delivering these messages during routine family care.

As Stormer et al. (2023) note, some parents respond defensively to critiques of sharenting, particularly when social media norms reward emotional or sensational content. Psychoeducation must, therefore, go beyond individual knowledge and also address the cultural normalization of oversharing, especially on platforms like TikTok or Instagram, where parental behaviour may be shaped by social validation or influencer imitation (Praveen, 2025).

Systemic support is crucial. Rubinelli and Diviani (2025) urge governments, tech platforms, and schools to incorporate digital health literacy into broader digital well-being initiatives. Praveen (2025) adds that educational efforts must also address maternal mental health and the commercialization of children, particularly in influencer cultures where social validation pressures may increase oversharing.

To better support families, future research should focus on highlighting long-term privacy repercussions and developing tools to educate parents about protecting children's online privacy (Zhao, 2018; Manotipya & Ghazinour, 2020).

In summary, psychoeducation holds considerable promise as a preventive and corrective tool for managing sharenting behaviours. Psychoeducation can mitigate the long-term risks associated with sharenting by enhancing digital literacy, fostering ethical reflection, and integrating privacy awareness into parenting support. To be truly effective, these programs must be participatory, culturally responsive, emotionally supportive, and integrated across systems that support families.

Chapter Summary

This literature review critically examines the developmental, relational, and ethical implications of sharenting and family vlogging, situating these practices within Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST), and Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach. These theoretical frameworks, alongside current empirical literature, illustrate how sharenting can interfere with children's autonomy, emotional regulation, identity formation, and digital consent.

Erikson's psychosocial theory (1950) offers insight into how sharenting may disrupt key developmental stages, including autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, and identity vs. role confusion. For example, parental control over children's online narratives can hinder their ability to make independent choices, fostering shame, self-doubt, and reduced self-efficacy (West et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2022; Rawiadji & Limanta, 2021). As children become accustomed to curated self-presentations, their intrinsic motivation may diminish, leading to increased anxiety and a decreased sense of individuality (Baxter &

Czarnecka, 2025; Padilla-Walker et al., 2020). During adolescence, when identity formation is critical, parental control over digital content can lead to a misalignment between the child's internal self and their public digital persona (Zhang, 2025; Walrave et al., 2023).

Bowen Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) deepens this analysis by focusing on emotional processes within family units. Concepts such as differentiation of self, triangulation, and the family projection process clarify how sharenting can blur relational boundaries and foster emotional reactivity. Parents may project their insecurities onto their children's digital identities, creating pressure for performance and reducing authentic emotional expression (Čepukienė, 2022; Gotwald et al., 2024; Peleg et al., 2025). Online audiences become third parties in triangulated relationships, displacing direct parent-child communication and escalating emotional distance (Lampis, 2015; Ivantes-Rodrigues et al., 2025). The digital legacy created by parents can lead to multigenerational patterns of overexposure and boundary confusion (Čepukienė, 2022), which challenges ethical considerations around consent, privacy, and long-term psychological harm (Gotwald et al., 2024).

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective frames sharenting as a form of impression management, where children become involuntary participants in their parents' performances. Social media acts as the "front stage," while authentic moments of parenting are often relegated to the "backstage" or lost entirely (Holiday et al., 2020; D'Amico, 2022). Children are frequently positioned as props in digital performances designed to affirm parental identity (Fox et al., 2022). As digital content becomes increasingly monetized or socially rewarded, the lines between private family life and public consumption become increasingly blurred, further limiting children's ability to shape their narratives (Abidin, 2017; Hassan, 2022).

To address these concerns, the literature review evaluates four interventions that offer developmentally supportive and ethically grounded responses to sharenting. Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P) (Cooper et al., 2009) emphasizes emotional availability and attachment security by encouraging caregivers to respond sensitively to children's cues. In the context of sharenting, COS-P offers tools to re-center the child's emotional needs and challenge performative parenting driven by external validation (Maxwell et al., 2021; Topham, 2018). COS-P also helps parents reframe their digital sharing through the lens of responsibility rather than ownership (Steinberg, 2017; Cai, 2023).

Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) (Lafrance et al., 2020) focuses on repairing relational ruptures and enhancing caregiver emotional literacy. Parents who sharent due to unmet emotional needs, such as shame or a desire for validation, can benefit from EFFT's emotion coaching techniques, which promote authentic connection and reduce reliance on digital performance (Meliani et al., 2023; Sabey et al., 2022). Research indicates that EFFT improves parental self-efficacy and helps repair trust when children report harm from past sharenting behaviours (Foroughe et al., 2023; Cansızlar & Şahin, 2025).

Mindful Parenting (Duncan et al., 2009; Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2021) provides a framework for present-focused, non-reactive caregiving. The approach encourages parents to pause, reflect, and consider the ethical weight of posting about their children online. Walrave et al. (2023) introduced the concept of *mindful sharenting*, which includes strategies such as anonymizing children's images or setting digital boundaries with family members. Mindful parenting also addresses the "privacy paradox" (Ní Bhroin et al., 2022), helping parents align their values with their digital behaviours despite societal pressure to perform parenthood online (Briazu et al., 2021).

Psychoeducation (Lukens & McFarlane, 2004) offers a structured approach to increasing parental awareness, digital literacy, and ethical decision-making in online contexts.

Psychoeducation can help parents understand the inherent privacy risks with sharenting, the long-term impact of digital footprints, and the importance of child consent (Barnes & Potter, 2021; Adawiah & Rachmawati, 2021). Programs incorporating psychoeducation have been shown to reduce oversharing, enhance respectful communication, and promote responsible digital practices (WilliamsCeci et al., 2021; Rubinelli & Diviani, 2025). By embedding sharenting awareness into broader parenting interventions and professional training, psychoeducation fosters safer, more intentional online behaviour and strengthens parent-child relationships both on and offline.

By synthesizing theory, research, and evidence-based interventions, this literature review demonstrates that sharenting is not just a modern parenting trend; it is a developmental, relational, and ethical concern with real consequences for children's well-being. Sharenting and family vlogging can impact their sense of autonomy, emotional security, and identity development. Using relational and reflective parenting interventions, such as COS-P, EFFT, mindful parenting, and psychoeducation, caregivers can make more thoughtful, child-centred choices. These approaches offer pathways for ethical decision-making that honour the child's rights, relational integrity, and developmental needs.

In this next chapter, I will summarize my findings and explore the implications of these findings for mental health professionals, parents and caregivers, and children and adolescents. It will consider how caregivers and mental health professionals will be able to apply this knowledge to support ethical, well-informed, and developmentally appropriate decision-making for sharenting. The chapter will offer research-informed recommendations tailored to different

audiences, including mental health practitioners, parents and caregivers, policy makers and government agencies, technology platforms and developers, as well as public health and community organizations. Chapter three will also address the limitations of the current research, highlighting areas where further study will be needed to strengthen understanding and practice.

Chapter 3: Summary of Findings, Discussion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The literature review in Chapter two focused on the psychological, relational, and ethical implications of sharenting and family vlogging, and applied Erikson's (1950) Psychosocial Development Theory, Bowen's (1978) Family Systems Theory, and Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical Approach to analyze how these practices impact children's well-being. The review identified issues related to sharenting that could limit children's autonomy, emotional security, and identity development when they are positioned as passive subjects to a digitally constructed narrative that usually favours parents' needs. The review also presents sharenting intervention tools and describes how approaches such as Circle of Security Parenting, Emotion Focused Family Therapy, Mindful Parenting, and psychoeducation can help caregivers make informed and respectful decisions about digital sharing. All of these approaches provide caregivers with tools for emotional connection, reflective decision-making, and a framework for establishing stronger boundaries around children's digital lives.

Chapter three applies the insights from the literature review to consider the implications of sharenting for mental health professionals, caregivers, and children, and offers recommendations for relevant stakeholders like mental health professionals, caregivers, policy makers and government bodies, social media platforms, and public health and community organizations. The chapter also outlines the limitations of the current bodies of research and identifies areas in research that need further study.

Discussion and Implications

This capstone demonstrates that sharenting is a complex and consequential parenting behaviour with implications that extend beyond social media use, touching on child

development, family systems, identity formation, and ethical caregiving. Situated within Erikson's Psychosocial Theory, Bowen Family Systems Theory, and Goffman's Dramaturgical Framework, the findings highlight systemic risks, particularly when caregivers are unaware of the long-term developmental and relational impacts of online overexposure. The following sections outline the implications of these findings for various stakeholders.

Implications for Mental Health Professionals and Counsellors

As social media becomes part of daily life for many families, mental health professionals are increasingly likely to see children and parents dealing with the emotional consequences of sharenting. Children who grow up with frequent online exposure may struggle with issues related to privacy, emotional safety, and autonomy (Čepukienė, 2022; Gotwald et al., 2024). These effects are not limited to influencers; ordinary families who share with good intentions may still see long-term relational strain.

In counselling, these dynamics may appear in indirect ways: children feeling anxious about being seen online, adolescents expressing frustration about how they are portrayed, or caregivers noticing changes in behaviour without understanding the cause. Clinicians need tools to connect these concerns to deeper family patterns and developmental needs.

Emotion-Focused Family Therapy helps highlight that emotional blocks can drive oversharing, such as fear, guilt, or shame, which may prevent parents from tuning in to their children's discomfort (Lafrance et al., 2020). What may appear as pride in a child may also reflect a parent's need for reassurance or approval, particularly when sharing is frequent, emotionally charged, or tied to feedback from others online. The parent may be unconsciously using the child's image or achievements to manage their internal stress, doubts about competence, or a desire for social validation. This dynamic can shift the focus away from the

child's emotional experience and toward the parent's unmet needs, making it more difficult for the child to feel seen for who they are.

Circle of Security Parenting, with its emphasis on emotional availability and the concept of a "secure base," offers another relevant lens. The model encourages parents to be present with their child's distress rather than managing or displaying it. This contrasts sharply with the habits of performance-driven parenting seen online (Cooper et al., 2017).

From a clinical point of view, sharenting raises important issues around consent, privacy, and how children come to understand their digital identity. When parents share personal moments online without asking, children may feel exposed or like they are being treated as objects rather than individuals. This connects with Goffman's idea that people present different versions of themselves depending on the audience. A child might feel that their private self does not match the version of them being shown online (Holiday et al., 2020). Over time, this mismatch can lead to struggles with self-image, social anxiety, or pressure to appear perfect, especially during the teenage years.

Clinical training still lacks formal education on digital parenting. Without this knowledge, counsellors may miss the chance to validate a child's discomfort or help a caregiver reconsider their sharing habits. As digital life continues to blur personal and public space, mental health professionals will play a vital role in helping families reflect, repair, and reconnect, both online and offline.

Implications for Parents and Caregivers

For many caregivers, sharenting feels like a natural extension of parenting. Sharing milestones, funny moments, or daily life can seem like a way to celebrate children and stay connected to others. However, even well-meaning sharing can shape a child's self-concept and

the parent–child relationship in ways that may not always be noticeable or obvious. These patterns of sharing, although culturally normalized, can reshape how parents perceive their role, identity, and relationship with their child.

Social media audiences reward posts that are visually appealing, emotionally engaging, and polished. This can create pressure for parents to present as the perfect, idealized version of parenting, even when it is far from reality. Bayraktar and Çelik (2025) suggested that various emotional needs, such as validation, praise, or approval, frequently drive the sharing of parenting events. Although these pressures are rarely recognized or acknowledged, they greatly affect what gets shared and how parents interpret their successes.

Some sharing practices are tied to deeper emotional dynamics. Bowen’s concept of emotional fusion (1978) helps explain how a parent’s identity can become enmeshed with the child’s, especially when the child’s behaviour, appearance, or success is shared online as part of the parent’s self-presentation (Gotwald et al., 2024). Digital content is not just a record of family life; it becomes a form of self-expression or reassurance for the caregiver. This may lead to difficulties in recognizing the child’s evolving autonomy or responding appropriately when the child requests privacy.

Role conflict can also arise. Parents must manage competing responsibilities of taking care of their child, maintain relationships with extended family and friends, and participate in sharing their parental pride, like many other parents do, online. As Ouvrein and Verswijvel (2019) note, some parents later report regrets or discomfort after realizing that content they once shared with pride no longer feels appropriate or has been received in ways they did not anticipate.

Today's parents are navigating social media sharing without clear norms or community-wide standards. By understanding how sharenting can impact them and their children both psychologically and relationally, caregivers can gain a deeper understanding of how digital habits are shaped and how they, in turn, influence the caregiving relationship.

Implications for Children and Adolescents

Children are not passive in the sharenting process. Even when they are too young to consent or speak up, they are still affected by how they are represented online. As they grow, these effects become more complex, shaping how they perceive themselves and how they relate to others.

Children need a safe and supportive environment to feel their emotions, make mistakes, and explore their identity without worrying about being watched or judged by an invisible online audience. When private moments, whether humorous, emotional, or chaotic, are shared publicly, it can send the message that their personal experiences exist for others' consumption. This can lead to embarrassment, confusion, or shame, particularly if the child was too young to understand or consent to the sharing (Gotwald et al., 2024). These concerns can intensify in adolescence, a time when they are shaping their identities and becoming more aware of how others perceive them. If their life has already been shared online, including photos, stories, or even moments of distress, they may feel that they have little control over how they are perceived. As these children age, they may feel confined to the fixed identity that was portrayed online, feeling as though they are permanently defined by their younger selves; hindering how they express themselves and mature. This can create a sense of disconnection, leaving adolescents feeling anxious, frustrated, or ashamed as they struggle to reconcile their authentic self with the image others expect them to be (Walrave et al., 2023; Zhang, 2025).

Research also suggests that children who are repeatedly featured in public posts may feel objectified or pressured to maintain a certain image. In some families, this can create a kind of performance, where the child feels they must smile, behave, or look a certain way to live up to the idealized version of themselves portrayed online (Gotwald et al., 2024). If children's discomfort is dismissed, they may learn that their feelings do not matter or that it is acceptable to have their boundaries ignored.

The effects of sharenting can go beyond relationships and self-image. Children may also face real-world risks, including having their personal information misused or their images taken and shared in harmful ways. Ferrara et al. (2023) point to concerns about images being used in sexually exploitative contexts or exposing children to stalking and identity theft. There can also be social consequences. A post that seems cute at age three may feel humiliating at age thirteen. Classmates or peers may tease, bully, or exclude children based on old content. These experiences can affect a child's confidence, social identity, and sense of belonging (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019).

Longer-term concerns are also emerging. Children raised in highly documented households often grow up with a digital footprint they did not choose. This content may still be online when they apply for jobs, enter relationships, or try to establish a professional image. As Zhang (2025) notes, the digital traces left behind by parents can limit a young person's control over their own public identity.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Mental Health Professionals

Mental health professionals are increasingly encountering families affected by digital sharing habits like sharenting (Hiniker et al., 2016; Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). As digital

culture becomes more integrated into family life, the therapeutic space is one of the few places where the emotional, relational, and developmental consequences of online exposure can be addressed directly. As social media becomes more embedded in parenting culture, mental health professionals will need to expand their conceptual frameworks, clinical tools, and psychoeducational strategies; however, most clinicians receive little to no formal training in this area. Sharenting is not yet widely understood as a clinical issue, even though it often intersects with attachment, identity, and family dynamics in meaningful ways. Clinical training modules should address the complexities of sharenting, including its ethical, developmental, and psychological dimensions. They should equip clinicians with strategies for guiding parents on privacy-protective practices and helping them understand the long-term digital footprint caused by sharenting (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024).

This capstone recommends COS-P, EFFT, Mindful Parenting and psychoeducation as interventions for working with families affected by sharenting. COS-P offers mental health counsellors a structured, attachment-informed framework to help caregivers understand and respond to their child's emotional needs without relying on external validation through online sharing. The model's visual map of the secure base and safe haven (see Appendix) can be used in sessions to explore how sharenting behaviours may reflect unmet attachment needs in the parent. COS-P's emphasis on reflective caregiving and being with the child in moments of distress or exploration provides a clinical entry point for reorienting caregivers away from performance-based parenting and toward relational presence.

Emotion-Focused Family Therapy equips counsellors with tools to address underlying emotional blocks, like shame, fear of inadequacy, and desire for validation, that may be driving excessive online sharing. Emotion coaching exercises help caregivers identify how unresolved

emotions influence their digital behaviour. Since EFFT emphasizes repair and attunement, it is especially useful when children express discomfort about being featured online. Counsellors can use EFFT to support collaborative boundary setting, promote emotional validation, and rebuild trust in families where sharenting has led to relational strain.

Counsellors can integrate Mindful Parenting practices to help foster parents' intentionality and awareness around sharenting decision-making and enhance parents' capacity to pause, reflect, and respond before posting. This capstone suggests using mindful sharenting as a counselling approach to help change these habits and reduce impulsive sharing. Counsellors can encourage parents to obscure identifying features, delay posts, and consider the long-term impacts. This intervention supports clients in aligning their digital behaviours with their parenting values and their child's developmental needs. Discussions around children's evolving sense of agency and the importance of including them in decisions about their digital visibility, may further reinforce these goals (Holloway & Green, 2016).

Psychoeducation is a low-barrier, evidence-based intervention for raising awareness about the psychological and ethical dimensions of sharenting and other harmful consequences. Mental health counsellors can use structured modules like reflective writing and value-mapping exercises to help parents critically examine their sharing habits, learn about digital footprints, and explore consent-based approaches. As reported in Chapter two of the capstone, psychoeducational interventions have been shown to reduce oversharing intent and increase protective behaviours (Williams-Ceci et al., 2021; Rubinelli & Diviani, 2025), making this model especially appropriate in preventative counselling and community education settings.

As the phenomenon of sharenting continues to grow and evolve, there is a clear need for counsellors to receive continuing education on sharenting and its effects. Professional

development opportunities, like workshops, clinical supervision, or graduate training, can prepare clinicians to respond thoughtfully and be informed on the topic. Without this knowledge, even skilled counsellors may overlook the emotional weight these digital habits carry for families and children. Mental health professionals can help to support caregivers, children, and families as they navigate sharenting. Mental health professionals must understand the impact sharenting has on children and the family unit, offer psychoeducation on privacy and consent, and help families repair relational ruptures when trust has been damaged.

Recommendations for Parents and Caregivers

Parents today are raising children in a world where personal moments can be shared instantly and widely. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook have become spaces where many caregivers express pride, seek connection, or document family life. As the research suggests, even small, well-intentioned choices can still have an impact on children in ways that are not immediately apparent (Zhang, 2025; Gotwald et al., 2024).

One of the most important actions parents can do is include children in decisions about what gets shared. Even young children can be asked how they feel about a photo before it is posted. Co-creating digital boundaries as a family not only gives children a voice but also helps them learn how to set and respect boundaries. If a child says they do not want a post online or asks for something to be taken down, it is important to honour their request. When children see that their feelings matter, it strengthens trust and connection.

Parents are also encouraged to take a close look at their privacy settings on who can share, see, and interact with their account. The present work recommends keeping their social media accounts private, review who follows them, and be selective about what is shared are basic but meaningful steps. Posts that include personal information, vulnerable moments, or

revealing imagery can follow a child for years, even if the intent behind the post was positive. Being cautious does not mean avoiding all sharing, but it does mean slowing down and reflecting on what is truly necessary and respectful to post.

The research presented in this capstone recommends that caregivers discuss digital boundaries with their extended family. Setting rules together as a family can help prevent conflict and consequences later on. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close friends may share photos, but there should be clear and established rules on what is and is not appropriate to post.

As noted in recent research, sharenting is often connected to deeper emotional needs such as the desire for validation, belonging, or reassurance (Bayraktar & Çelik, 2025). Parenting can be lonely, and social media offers a way to feel seen and supported. When sharing becomes the main source of connection, it may be time to reflect on whether those needs are being fully met. If sharing feels like a compulsion or is causing conflict in the family, it may be helpful to speak with a counsellor or join a parenting group for support.

Before posting, parents should pause and think carefully about their reasons for sharing. Simple changes like hiding a child's face, limiting the audience, or delaying posts can reduce risks and keep children's dignity intact (Isaac-Greene, 2025).

Caregivers can also benefit from learning more about how digital exposure affects children as they grow. Children may experience embarrassment, identity confusion, or social anxiety as a result of posts they had no say in (Walrave et al., 2023). Posting with awareness, collaboration, and respect can make a meaningful difference in how children feel seen, heard, and protected within their families.

Recommendations for Policy Makers and Government Bodies

While current laws offer protections for children in traditional media, but when it comes to sharenting there are few equivalent safeguards. Without proper legal protections, many children are left vulnerable to privacy breaches, emotional distress, and even financial exploitation, especially when family content is monetized. The current self-regulatory approach of social media platforms is insufficient and fails to protect children's best interests (Lachance, 2024). Recent research highlights that there are significant weaknesses in how major social media companies enforce policies around child-related content. This can create conditions that may enable harmful or even illegal practices to occur without recourse (Lavorgna et al., 2022). This points to the need for more vigorous, enforceable regulation that holds both content creators and platforms accountable for protecting children.

In British Columbia, child performers working in film or television are covered under the Employment Standards Regulation of the Employment Standards Act (RSBC 1996, c 113), which ensures income protections, limits working hours, and mandates adult supervision on set. However, children in family vlogs do not receive these same legal protections. As a result, children can be central to a brand or family income without any guarantee that they will benefit financially. More work needs to be done to develop clear legislation to regulate children's involvement in monetized content; this could include mandatory trust accounts, age-appropriate consent protocols, and updated labour laws (Lachance, 2024).

Sharenting can mistakenly put children at risk from which they are unlikely to recoup because the content posted publicly can be stolen or misused. Some of the research has found that images of children can be found on exploitative websites, or used to harass the child (Ferrara et al., 2023). Policymakers can help to curb these risks by supporting regulations that hold

platforms accountable for how they handle content involving children. This includes shifting away from voluntary compliance models toward mandatory standards, as well as building in safeguards against unauthorized data sharing, reposting, or commercial repurposing of child-related content (Lavorgna et al., 2022).

Governments can do their part by initiating public education campaigns around digital parenting. Many caregivers want to figure out how to navigate sharenting, but they are doing so without guidance. Public messages can help to inform them of the best practices. Campaigns should be supplemented with practical resources such as digital literacy guidelines to help educate families about the ethical, psychological and legal ramifications of sharenting (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). Guidelines can help caregivers make more thoughtful and data-driven choices about their online behaviour and what they share, while also stressing consent, dignity, and the impact their choices have on their children's digital footprints.

In order to further support these efforts, policymakers should consider investing in further research on sharenting, as well as the types of supports we can develop for families affected by it. Despite the growing presence of children online, there is limited longitudinal data on the psychological and relational outcomes of sharenting, and there is little research on interventions with sharenting. There is a need for a stronger evidence base to develop policy, create interventions, and better support children (Gordon, 2024; Barnes & Potter, 2021).

Recommendations for Technology Platforms and Developers

Many social media companies have addressed problems like cyberbullying and general privacy, but few actively protect children whose lives are shared online by their parents or caregivers. Most platforms give full control to the adult who posts the content, leaving children with no say, even when the post makes them feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or unsafe.

Platforms can take a simple but important step by giving children the ability to flag or request the removal of posts that feature them. They could add a “child-reporting” tool to any post where a child is tagged or identified. Designers should make this tool private, easy to use, and informed by input from child development and privacy experts. This tool would give kids more control over their online presence.

Social media platforms should also update their content review policies to recognize sharenting as a potential source of harm. When someone, whether it be a child, peer, teacher, or another adult, flags a post, the platform should immediately remove it while the platform investigates. This step would help to prevent the content from spreading further and protect the child during the review.

Platforms can limit how people share posts that include children. They can restrict the ability to forward, download, or repost these posts. These added protections would reduce the risk of unwanted sharing and give children more power over their digital presence.

Recommendations for Public Health and Community Organizations

Public health and community organizations can play an important role in addressing the growing risks associated with sharenting and family vlogging. The following recommendations offer practical, evidence-based strategies to help organizations support child privacy, caregiver education, and digital safety at the community level.

This capstone recommends that public health initiatives include sharenting in broader public conversations about child safety and digital literacy, opening space for dialogue and raising awareness of its effects, this can include public service announcements and psychoeducational campaigns. These could include short videos, infographics, or reels shared on platforms where parents are already active, such as Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube. These

materials should emphasize consent and safety, its consequences, and ways to mitigate risks like blurring out faces in pictures. More traditional outreach methods, such as distributing pamphlets in pediatric clinics, displaying posters in community centers, or airing radio and TV spots, is also beneficial for raising awareness for sharenting. Resources should be available in multiple formats and languages, and made publicly accessible at places such as libraries, schools, pediatric offices, parenting classes, and community hubs. By making these tools visible and accessible, public health systems can offer important information on sharenting and offer resources to the community.

The need for connection is one of the most common motivations behind sharenting; many caregivers share content online in search of support, reassurance, or a sense of belonging (Bayraktar & Çelik, 2025; Latipah et al., 2020). Public health and community groups can help by creating safe, in-person spaces where parents can find connection and support without needing to turn to social media. Community organizations can help parents feel more connected by creating spaces to meet, make friends, and spend time with others. This could involve regular events, such as parenting groups, caregiver meetups, or local family days, which should encourage both new friendships and time with existing friends or family. When parents feel supported in real life, they may be less likely to rely on social media for connection. In-person spaces also make it easier to have open, judgment-free conversations about how social media affects their family.

Public health agencies and community centers can host regular, low-barrier workshops that teach parents how to involve children in decisions about online sharing. These workshops should model age-appropriate consent conversations, explore the difference between private and public content, teach strategies for setting digital boundaries with children, and ways we can alter behaviours to better protect children. Walrave and colleagues (2023) argue that involving

children in consent decisions helps support their autonomy and can reduce tension in family relationships.

Legal systems usually step in after harm has happened, but public health focuses on preventing problems before they start. With the right education, messaging, and support, public health groups can help caregivers use digital tools in ways that prioritize connection, safety, and long-term well-being.

Limitations

This capstone presents a theory-informed examination of sharenting and its relational, ethical, and psychological implications; however, several limitations must be addressed. These limitations arise from substantial gaps in the empirical literature, a lack of tailored interventions, and broader challenges in keeping up with a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Gaps in the Literature

Research into sharenting have some significant gaps in methodology. For example, the majority of previous work has focused on mothers while only a few studies focus on fathers' behaviours (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). In addition, the perspectives of children are largely missing. A systematic review found that almost all of the studies rely on parent or caregiver accounts, and Tosuntaş & Griffiths (2024) argue for research projects that include children's views, including how they feel about sharing or not sharing their images. The silence prevents people from understanding about how sharenting impacts family dynamics, as children's perspectives are very important to fully comprehend the implications. In order to determine whether these concerns are the same globally, we need diversity in research and cross-cultural studies (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024).

Most of the academic studies on sharenting use cross-sectional surveys or small qualitative samples, which, although descriptive, do not offer any evidence on the long-term impacts or causality. Longitudinal research is almost nonexistent, making it difficult to track changes in parents' posting behaviour or shifts in children's attitudes over time. One experimental study assessed only short-term attitude changes but did not assess for any changes in behaviour (Williams-Ceci et al., 2021). Qualitative studies often rely on small sample sizes of homogeneous groups. These limitations may result in findings that are difficult to generalize to broader populations. Researchers have consistently called for larger, longitudinal, and experimental designs to strengthen the evidence base. As Ranzini et al. (2020) point out, the evidence base suffers from a lack of temporal depth and a lack of causal clarity needed to understand how sharenting (as a practice) evolves and what effect it can produce. The field is still developing and lacks the scale, diversity, and methodological rigor necessary to substantiate better empirical findings (Walrave et al., 2023; Williams-Ceci et al., 2021).

There are some other gaps regarding psychological and contextual factors that may affect sharenting. The limited number of studies have looked into the relationships between sharenting behaviours and variables like parenting style, personality characteristics, or emotional needs. One review has suggested looking into other traits, such as attachment style or need for social validation, for example, as predictors of sharenting behaviours (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024).

There is also little known about how other external influences, such as legal rules and regulations, cultural norms, or intra-family dynamics, might affect decision-making around sharing. Most studies have examined online behaviours like parental blogging or social support groups as opposed to the offline consequences of sharenting on family relationships, emotional trust, or conflict (Cataldo et al., 2022). Privacy regulations and their potential influence on

sharenting have received little empirical research. Keskin et al. (2023) suggested that, due to the risks identified with sharenting, professionals like pediatricians or social workers should provide information to families about the potential risks of sharenting; however, there is insufficient systematic literature examining interventions.

Gaps in Interventions

Although academic research has increasingly recognized the concept of sharenting, most studies concentrate on defining the term and describing its emergence in contemporary parenting. Researchers have paid much less attention to how they should respond and intervene when sharenting causes distress in children or tension within family systems. Researchers have produced very few studies investigating effective ways to help families manage the challenges of sharenting. Therapeutic approaches specifically designed to address the emotional or relational fallout from this type of digital exposure remain lacking. This lack of clinical guidance makes mental health professionals struggle to respond consistently or in an evidence-informed way when these issues arise in practice.

Currently, no standardized tools evaluate the psychological or developmental effects of sharenting in clinical practice, and practitioners lack formal guidelines or structured assessments to help them address these concerns with children, parents, and families. Clinicians must rely on personal judgment to decide how and when to address the issue.

Therapeutic approaches like Circle of Security Parenting, Emotion-Focused Family Therapy, and Mindful Parenting offer useful concepts. These models focus on emotional connection, caregiver self-awareness, and repairing relational disruptions, which relate to the interpersonal challenges that sharenting may create. However, no one has adapted these

frameworks for sharenting, and very few empirical studies have tested their effectiveness in this context.

Areas for Future Research

Future research should expand beyond small, interview-based samples by recruiting larger, more demographically diverse samples and employing mixed methods such as surveys, social-media trace analyses, and logging posting behaviour. These approaches will help researchers to test whether patterns observed in qualitative studies are valid across broader populations and contexts, improving the generalizability of findings and revealing trends in sharenting practices. Using a mixed-methods approach combining self-reported data, like interviews and surveys, with observational data can provide more nuanced insights into how families manage privacy and boundaries on digital platforms (Ranzini et al., 2020; Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024).

Including children and adolescents as active participants is essential to understanding how early digital exposure shapes youth identity and privacy perceptions. Age-appropriate interviews, diaries, or participatory methods can capture young people's lived experiences, filling a critical gap left by parent-only perspectives and guiding the development of consent protocols that respect youth autonomy (Walrave et al., 2023). Most current research is still parent-focused, leaving children's perspectives underexplored. Future studies should adopt developmental lenses and track how children interpret and internalize their online presence over time, using longitudinal research to assess long-term outcomes (Ranzini et al., 2020; Cataldo et al., 2022).

Longitudinal and experimental designs are needed to establish causal links and track outcomes over time. By following families for months or years, researchers can assess how early posting influences social, emotional, and identity development into adolescence and adulthood.

For example, future studies could examine how parental sharenting evolves based on feedback they receive, such as positive reinforcement or critical comments, and how these responses shape parents' digital habits (Walrave et al., 2023). Collecting data over extended periods would help contextualize shifting parental practices in response to changing platform norms and developmental milestones (Ranzini et al., 2020). Randomized trials can also help identify which strategies effectively reduce oversharing and promote family well-being.

There is a clear need for research on interventions aimed at addressing the challenges of sharenting. Most scholarly research has focused on describing the phenomenon and its potential harms. However, very few studies have tested clinical interventions or modalities to help families navigate online sharing in healthy, developmentally appropriate ways. Without pilot trials, randomized studies, or longitudinal research, we cannot know which strategies reduce oversharing, strengthen parent–child relationships, or safeguard children's digital privacy. Future work should develop and evaluate interventions, such as psychoeducational workshops, mindfulness-based sharenting curricula, and therapy-informed tools, to further understand this complex issue. Without systematic testing, practitioners lack the evidence-based guidance needed to recommend best practices.

Exploring sharenting as a family-level phenomenon will shed light on systemic patterns and relational dynamics. Research grounded in family systems theory can map how posting decisions are negotiated among spouses, siblings, and multiple generations, and how those interactions affect trust, boundaries, and emotional safety within the household (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Researchers also need to consider intersectional factors such as parental age, gender, digital literacy, and cultural backgrounds, which influence parents' motivations, boundaries, and

perceived risks related to sharenting. Clarifying these aspects can help explain why some parents share content mindfully while others do not (Walrave et al., 2023).

Research must examine the sharenting practices of fathers, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives, rather than focusing solely on mothers. These family members often contribute to a child's digital footprint, yet their motivations, boundary-setting strategies, and ethical considerations are still underexplored. By conducting comparative studies across caregiver roles will clarify where tailored guidance is most needed. Conceptualizing sharenting as a family-level phenomenon allows researchers to explore systemic dynamics and relational negotiations over posting decisions (Baxter & Czarnecka, 2025; Barnes, R., & Potter, 2020).

Unpacking the deeper motivations behind sharenting, including anxiety, social comparison, and unmet emotional needs, is necessary to inform targeted supports. Qualitative and psychometric studies can explore the conscious and unconscious drivers, aiding caregivers in recognizing when their posting serves their own needs more than their child's (Walrave et al., 2023; Ranzini et al., 2020).

Future research should also focus on how sharenting content is perceived by viewers, including how it shapes public attitudes toward children's privacy and parental responsibility. Understanding social feedback loops could provide important information for ethical guidelines and stipulations for better sharing practices and platform moderation policy.

To build a substantial, cumulative evidence base, it requires diverse samples, longitudinal tracking, and rigorous experimentation. Researchers should aim to produce replicable, theory-informed research that considers different cultures, socioeconomic statuses, and family structures. The participants of many existing studies, such as Walrave et al. (2023), have been culturally homogenous, and further comparative research is needed to assess how cultural

differences influence sharenting motivations and behaviours across countries and communities. Only through such a comprehensive approach can the field develop clear, evidence-based guidelines for the safe and ethical sharing of family life online.

Sharenting is now widely recognized as a relevant and timely issue; however, academic research in this area is still in its early stages of development. Addressing the current gaps by using more diverse samples, stronger study designs, and systematic testing of interventions will be essential for developing evidence-based guidance on safe social media use within families. The evolving nature of sharenting calls for interdisciplinary collaboration to better understand its implications and address the ethical and legal challenges it presents. A coordinated effort from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers is needed to balance the benefits of digital sharing with the urgent need to protect children's privacy and autonomy (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). Future research should directly inform policy aimed at establishing and enhancing children's digital rights, especially regarding informed consent and visibility online.

Workshop Proposal

This capstone proposes a workshop for parents and caregivers called *Sharing with Care* (see Appendix B), designed to address the growing practice of sharenting. The *Sharing with Care* program is a structured, four-week psychoeducation series designed to address sharenting. This proposal outlines a workshop for parents and caregivers that applies the research findings, theory, and analysis from this capstone to a practical, educational format. The program offers accessible, evidence-based strategies to help families make informed, ethical, and child-centered decisions about sharing children's lives online.

The program is grounded in three key theoretical frameworks that help explain the psychological and social impact of sharenting. Erikson's (1950) Psychosocial Development

Theory highlights how childhood and adolescence are critical times for developing autonomy and a stable sense of identity, both of which can be disrupted if a child's life is heavily curated online before they have a say. Bowen (1978) Family Systems Theory demonstrates how sharing children's lives online can blur generational boundaries and make it harder for them to develop a clear, independent sense of self. Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical Approach offers a sociological perspective and considers sharenting as a form of performance and impression management that can change how children are perceived by themselves and by others.

The *Sharing with Care* proposal workshop integrates three evidence-based parenting interventions: Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P), Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT), and Mindful Parenting. Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P) (Cooper et al., 2009) offers an attachment-based framework for understanding the "secure base" and "safe haven" roles that caregivers provide, while also emphasizing the importance of "Being-With", the capacity to be emotionally present and attuned to a child's needs in the moment. Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) (LaFrance, et al., 2020) offers strategies for tuning in to children's emotional responses, which is especially important when they express discomfort with being posted online (Robinson et al., 2019). Mindful Parenting techniques encourage parents to pause and reflect before sharing, replacing automatic posting with intentional choices that put the child's best interest first (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997).

This series is designed for parents, guardians, and foster caregivers of children from birth to age 18. It is especially valuable for new and expecting parents, as well as those raising pre-teens and teens who are more aware of, and sensitive to, their online presence. While participants don't need any background in psychology, each session is facilitated by a professional trained in COS-P, EFFT, and mindful parenting so that theoretical insights are shared in plain, practical

language. Over the course of four sessions, participants move from building awareness to practicing skills and finally to creating a sustainable family plan for online sharing.

Session one, *Psychoeducation and Understanding the Risks*, introduces the concept of sharenting and explores its potential downsides: online harassment, safety risks from revealing locations, the possibility of sexual exploitation of images, the loss of privacy, and the creation of a lasting digital record (Leaver, 2017; Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). Parents take part in a “Digital Footprint Reality Check,” searching for what’s already online about themselves or their children, often sparking important conversations right from the start.

Session two, *Healthy Attachment in a Digital Age*, takes a closer look at COS-P principles and the idea of “Being-With”, being present with a child rather than focusing on performing for an online audience (Powell et al., 2013). Through guided reflection and role-play, parents practice responding to a child’s discomfort about being posted online in ways that strengthen trust and connection rather than defending their own posting habits.

In session three, *Boundaries, Consent, and Privacy for Kids*, the focus shifts to involving children in decisions about their online presence. Drawing on Bowen’s work, this session emphasizes how clear boundaries help children form a secure sense of self (Bowen, 1978). Parents learn age-appropriate consent strategies, introducing the idea with toddlers, giving school-age children a clear say, and negotiating with teenagers. Participants also begin drafting a Family Sharing Contract that includes each family member’s “non-negotiables” (Livingstone & Third, 2017).

In the fourth and final session, *Ethical and Empowered Sharing*, mindful parenting techniques are combined with digital safety strategies. Parents learn the “Pause, Notice, Choose,” a technique for posting mindfully (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997), and learn about the

different ways to protect children while sharing online: blurring faces, making accounts private, only following people the parent knows, avoiding identifiable details, and waiting to post until after leaving a location (Leaver, 2017). The workshop ends with participants completing and committing to their Family Sharing Contract, promoting accountability and community support.

By the end of the workshop, participants should be able to recognize when online sharing may conflict with a child's autonomy or well-being, have meaningful dialogue about consent, and create a clear, collaborative agreement about what can and cannot be shared. Beyond helping individual families, Sharing with Care encourages a shift toward more ethical, respectful, and mindful online sharing, and encourages practices that protect privacy, foster consent, and prioritize the child's perspective.

Conclusion

The purpose of this capstone was to explore how sharenting and family vlogging affect children's psychological, emotional, and relational development. As these practices become more prevalent, they raise important concerns around privacy, consent, and the long-term impact of growing up in a public digital environment. This topic is especially important for caregivers and mental health practitioners because digital exposure can shape a child's emotional development, identity, and sense of autonomy in ways that are not always apparent but can have lasting effects. Understanding these impacts helps adults make more thoughtful, protective decisions in an online world that often rewards oversharing.

In Chapter two, we reviewed current literature on sharenting. We used three theoretical orientations to help understand the effects of digital exposure on children. Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory helped explain how online sharing can interfere with a child's ability to develop autonomy and a stable identity. Bowen's Family Systems Theory focused on

how sharenting can blur emotional boundaries and affect family roles and dynamics. Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach showed how children may be placed into ongoing public performances that they cannot consent to or control.

The chapter also explored four interventions that offer guidance to caregivers and practitioners. Circle of Security Parenting helps parents support their child's emotional needs while respecting their need for independence. Emotion-Focused Family Therapy addresses emotional blocks that can affect how parents relate to their children. Mindful Parenting encourages parents to slow down, stay present, and consider the emotional impact of their actions on their children. Psychoeducation provides tools to help families understand the risks and create healthier digital boundaries.

In Chapter three, we examined the implications of these findings for key stakeholders. We considered how caregivers and mental health professionals can utilize this information to make more informed, ethical, and developmentally appropriate decisions. We also discussed research-based recommendations for mental health practitioners, parents and caregivers, policy makers and government bodies, technology platforms and developers, and public health and community organizations. Chapter three proposed a four-session parent and caregiver workshop, *Sharing with Care*, designed to translate the research into practical, evidence-based strategies for safe and respectful online sharing. We also acknowledged the limitations of the research as well as suggestions for future research.

This capstone highlights the need for more support, awareness, and ethical guidance in digital parenting. Children deserve to grow up with a sense of privacy, agency, and emotional safety. As our online habits continue to evolve, so must our understanding of what responsible parenting looks like in the digital age.

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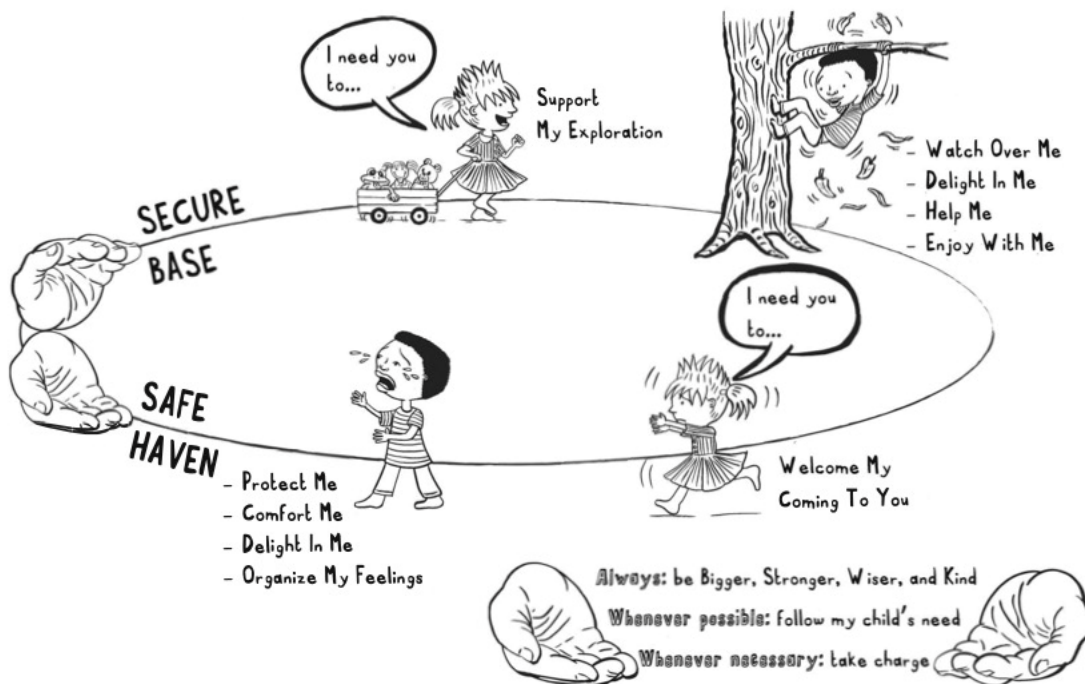
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Appendix A

Circle of Security

Circle of Security
Caregiver Attending To The Child's Needs



Appendix B

Sharing with Care

Psychoeducation Workshop Proposal: Facilitator's Guide

Purpose

To help parents and caregivers understand the risks of sharenting, strengthen digital boundaries, and create family agreements for safe, respectful sharing of children's information online.

Background and Rationale

"Sharenting", a term that combines *sharing* and *parenting*, referring to the practice of parents publicly sharing images, videos, or information about their children on social media and other online platforms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Lichtenstein, 2017), is now a cultural norm. By age five, the average child has over 1,000 photos posted online by their caregivers. While often well-intentioned, this digital exposure can affect children's autonomy, identity formation, and emotional well-being (Leaver, 2017; Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017).

This workshop synthesizes research findings from Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Bowen Family Systems Theory, and Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach to reveal how curated online portrayals shape self-concept, disrupt family dynamics, and create lasting digital legacies.

This program translates those insights into practical, accessible strategies for parents. It draws on four evidence-based interventions, Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P), Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT), and Mindful Parenting, to foster ethically responsible, child-centred sharing practices.

Program Goals

- Increase Awareness: Help parents understand how online sharing affects children's psychological development and family relationships.
- Promote Ethical Practices: Equip caregivers with tools to prioritize children's consent, privacy, and emotional safety.
- Strengthen Digital Boundaries: Support families in creating sustainable, respectful online sharing guidelines.
- Build Peer Support: Reduce isolation and stigma around changing digital habits.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the program, participants will be able to:

- Explain the developmental and relational implications of sharenting.
- Recognize when online sharing may conflict with a child’s autonomy or well-being.
- Apply attachment-based and mindful strategies to digital decision-making.
- Co-create a Family Digital Agreement that reflects both parent and child needs.

Target Audience

- Parents, guardians, and foster caregivers of children aged 0–18.
- Particularly beneficial for new parents, expecting parents, and those with pre-teens or teens.

Program Structure

- **Format:** 4 × 50-minute interactive workshops (in-person or online)
- **Group Size:** 10–20 participants for optimal discussion and support
- **Facilitator:** Mental health professional or parenting educator trained in COS-P, EFFT, and mindful parenting

Session 1 — Psychoeducation and Understanding the Risks

Length: 50 minutes

Objectives:

- Define sharenting and why it’s so common.
- Identify the potential risks to children.
- Begin building awareness of participants’ current sharing habits.

Plan:

1. **Welcome & Introductions**
 - Briefly explain the purpose of the series.
 - Ask each participant to share one reason they post (or don’t post) about their child.
2. **What is Sharenting?**
 - Define in plain language.

- Posting photos, videos, or personal details about your child online, including in private groups.
 - Common examples: birthday party pics, first day of school, funny moments, achievements.
 - Not just social media but also messaging apps, blogs, and public digital photo albums.
- 3. Why We Share**
- Pride in our children.
 - Desire to feel connected.
 - Documenting memories.
 - Seeking advice or support.
 - Ask: What other motivations can we think of?
- 4. The Hidden Costs**
- Harassment & Bullying: Photos can be copied, altered, and used to tease your child.
 - Safety Risks: Backgrounds, uniforms, geotags can give away location.
 - Sexual Exploitation: Innocent family images can be misused.
 - Loss of Privacy: Kids may later be embarrassed.
 - Digital Legacy: Record starts before they can decide.
 - Ask: What kinds of details in a photo could give away location without you realizing?
- 5. Activity: Digital Footprint Check**
- In pairs, search your name/child's name (if safe).
 - Note what surprised you.
 - Group discussion: "What would you want removed?"
- 6. Group Debrief**
- Discuss findings and feelings.

Session 2 — Healthy Attachment in a Digital Age

Length: 50 minutes

Objectives:

- Introduce COS-P principles.

- Explore “Being-With” and how it applies to online choices.

Materials:

- Circle of Security graphic (see Appendix A)

Plan:

1. **Check-In**
 - Ask: “What did you notice when you used the Quick Check Before You Post?”
2. **COS-P Principles Overview**
 - Explain what the Circle of Security is.
 - Secure Base: Child uses you to explore.
 - Safe Haven: Child comes back for comfort.
 - Link to the digital world: being there in the moment matters more than showing the moment online.
3. **Being-With**
 - Explain “Being-With”
 - Fully present instead of thinking about the camera and capturing the moment.
 - Ask: “What does being-with mean to you? What stood out to you? How does this apply to digital sharing?”
4. **Activity: Role-Play**
 - Get in pairs or groups.
 - Scenario: Child says, “I don’t like that picture of me online.”
 - Practice responding with presence instead of defending posting choices.
5. **Take-Home Action**
 - Ask participants to note moments this week where they feel the need to take pictures or videos, or the desire to post.

Session 3 — Boundaries, Consent, and Privacy for Kids

Length: 50 minutes

Objectives:

- Help families set clear online boundaries and involve kids in decisions.

Materials:

- Family Sharing Contract (see Appendix C)

Plan:

1. **Check-In**

- Discuss last week’s take home task.
 - Ask: What was happening when you felt like you needed to record or post? How did you respond to that desire? Why or why not?
2. **Why Boundaries Matter**
 - Kids need a separate identity online.
 - Boundaries protect trust and safety.
 - Parents model boundaries for children, paying attention to how they respect them or dismiss them.
 3. **Consent Conversations**
 - School-age: let them say yes or no.
 - Teens: negotiate and respect privacy.
 - Explain to them what the post is about, where they are posting it, and who can see it.
 4. **Activity: Role-Play**
 - Get in pairs or groups.
 - Role-play asking a 6-year-old and 13-year-old for consent.
 - Participants practice asking and respecting “no” answers.
 5. **Family Agreement Drafting**
 - Start a family sharing contract and identify 3–5 “non-negotiables” (no bath photos, no location tags, etc.).
 6. **Take-Home Action**
 - Bring the Family Sharing Contract home
 - Ask each child at home for 3-5 “non-negotiables” for them.

Session 4 — Ethical and Empowered Sharing

Length: 50 minutes

Objectives:

- Finalize family rules, apply mindful posting, and learn practical protection strategies.

Plan:

1. **Check-In**
 - Review progress on the Family Sharing Contract.
 - Ask the group to share some of their “non-negotiables” if they want to.

- Ask: Did your children share any “non-negotiables” that surprised you? How did the conversation with your children go? Will you respect their “non-negotiables”?
- 2. Mindful Parenting Online**
- Teach the “Pause, Notice, Choose” method.
 1. Pause before posting.
 2. Notice feelings and reasons.
 3. Choose based on the child's best interest.
 - Ask: Have you ever deleted a post after thinking about it?
- 3. Guided Mindfulness Exercise**
- Practice taking a pause.
- 4. Ways to Protect Your Child**
- Blur or crop faces.
 - Review your followers and remove unknown accounts.
 - Make accounts private.
 - Avoid showing personal info (school name, address, street signs).
 - Avoid posting in real-time (wait until you're home).
 - Ask: Which of these could you start doing right away?
- 5. Finalize Agreement**
- Review, troubleshoot, and complete both parts.
- 6. Commitment Sharing Circle**
- Each participant shares one change.
 - Ask: What information from this workshop surprised you most?
- 7. Wrap-Up**
- Sign the Family Sharing Contract they made and take it home.
 - Encourage reviewing the agreement every 6 months, or when needed.

Appendix C
Family Sharing Contract

We agree as a family to:

- E.g. Ask for consent before sharing personal photos or stories online, Avoid posting content that involves nudity, personal information, or personal struggles, Discuss how long a post will stay online and who can see it, E.g. Respect “no” when someone doesn’t want something shared, E.g. Talk about online comments or questions before responding.
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Signatures:

Parent(s): _____

Child(ren): _____

Date: _____

To be Revised on: _____