



photo illustration by Sam Goldman

# staying on track

Parents increasingly rely on tracking apps to know where their teens are



As sophomore Evelyn Goering looks at the map on her phone, small icons show her exactly which restaurant her friends stopped at to get lunch. As they leave the restaurant, their icons begin to move across the screen, letting her know which route they are taking back to school. All of this is made possible by a tracking app, installed on her phone by her parents, which allows her to see her family and friends' locations at all times—and allows them to see hers.

Tracking apps, such as Life360 and Glympe, have

become an increasingly popular means for parents to track their children, whether it be their location, driving speed or phone activity. According to a 2015 Pew Research Center report, 16 percent of parents of 13-17 year-olds use tracking apps to monitor their teenager's location.

"They've always tracked my phone, since sixth grade," Goering said. "Just so they know where I'm at. I'm really bad about answering my phone and they wanted to make sure I'm not dead."

Sophomore Daniela Lopez's parents decided to

track her phone for similar reasons, starting at the beginning of her freshman year.

"My parents let me go wherever I want, they just want to make sure they know where I'm at 24/7," Lopez said. "They have the app on me so they can make sure I'm safe and they know where I'm at, even when I can't text them."

A concern for safety was also what led Social Studies teacher Tina Keith to install location tracking apps on her two kids' phones.

"It wasn't so much tracking their phones to spy on them, so to speak, it was more of a safety issue," Keith said. "My daughter's a senior, so when she tells me she's going somewhere, I double check to make sure she got there, make sure she's telling me the whole story."

The desire to keep him out of trouble was the motivation for senior Joseph Cauthon's parents to track his cell phone.

"[It was] making sure that I stay out of trouble," Cauthon said. "They're a bit cautious, which is understandable."

Cauthon sees the benefit in his parents being able to locate him in the case of an emergency.

"There's benefits and disadvantages to it," Cauthon said. "If I end up getting hurt or whatever, then they can't find me in time."

A potential emergency situation is the reason Keith continues to track her son's cell phone location, even though he is now in college.

"My son's in college, I still have it on his phone, and it's because he drives back and forth between Lawrence and here," Keith said. "I just want to make sure he doesn't get in an accident, if he does I know where he's at, etc."

Lopez sees the advantage in being able to locate close family and friends in the event an accident were to happen.

"I have my friends on there too," she said. "My closest friend, I have her on there in case something ever happens to her, I know where she's at."

However, despite the benefits, Lopez would ultimately rather not be tracked.

"If I got to choose, I would choose not to, but I have to have it, so I don't mind it," Lopez said.

Cauthon agrees that he would rather not be tracked, as it starts feeling like an invasion of privacy at times.

"There's times when I just want to be left alone," Cauthon said. "It was a bit intrusive at times, but after awhile I just learned to live with it."

According to social worker Emily Dorothy, the trick is to find a balance between keeping kids safe and allowing them some freedom.

"I do monitor my daughter's phone and regularly talk to her about what she is using and what she is doing on her phone," Dorothy said. "I do not stalk her or read every single thing but I do check it. It is hard to find the balance between making sure she has some privacy and making sure she is being safe."

Despite parents' best intentions to keep kids safe, tracking apps do not always work as intended. According to Goering, her tracking app malfunctions occasionally, leading her mom to believe she isn't where she says she is.

"Sometimes my location on my phone is wrong and she'll text me and she'll be yelling at me but I'm actually just sitting at North," Goering said. "It's hap-

pended multiple times, I just send her a picture of where I'm at and everything's fine, but the location on my phone is wrong."

Despite trying to turn the app off in the past, she has ultimately learned to live with it.

"I've turned it off before and she figured that out and that didn't go very well," Goering said. "But it's not really a big deal to me because I'm not ever really doing anything I'm not supposed to be doing. Kids who are doing stuff they're not supposed to be doing, it's probably an issue."

Lopez agrees that while she would rather not be tracked, she was able to adjust to it easily.

"I don't mind it," Lopez said. "It's not like I have anything to hide."

According to Dorothy, the key is maintaining open communication between parents and children, so kids understand why their parents chose to track them.

"I think it is a struggle for parents and kids," Dorothy said. "Parents did not grow up with phones and so do not totally understand the importance of phones in their kids' lives. Kids do not want their parents tracking their private information. So I think it can become a power struggle. But it still is an important conversation to continue to have." story by

Grace Altenhofen

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**-Emily Dorothy,  
Social Worker**