

incline and was in a pool of water less than a mile from their house. "Every parent knows: that two days was like two years." Church sees parents using it more as a deterrent than a source of evidence: "It's not about spying, it's about safety. One of my customers told his son, 'This isn't for me to watch you; I will not be checking it every day. But we will sit down every Saturday and analyze your driving, and if it's been good, you will have the privilege of driving again next week.'"

For younger kids there are simplified GPS-tracking devices already on the market that have minimal phone capabilities. Wherify Wireless of Redwood Shores, Calif., was the first to introduce watches for children with built-in GPS. However, they discontinued the watches earlier this year in favor of the Wherifone because they found that parents wanted two-way calling as well as the locator function. Available this fall, their GPS cell phone is about the size of a credit card, with pre-programmed buttons. Parents go online to set the functions, the numbers the phone is allowed to call and accept calls from, and to find its location.

Some new phones are designed not to find out where a child is, but to keep tabs on how the child is using the phone. Phones from Firefly, Leapfrog and Enfora are both simple cell phones for kids released this summer; they don't include GPS. They only allow users to make and accept calls from pre-programmed numbers, have limited call times, and direct dial buttons for parents. They're small and light enough to fit in the hands of 6- to 12-year-olds and the bright colors, flashing lights and in Tictalk's case, educational games, look like an attempt to keep pre-teens mildly interested in what are essentially walkie-talkies. Toy manufacturers like Hasbro and Disney plan to release a similar phone in the fall, and Motorola in India is working on a fully tricked out phone, which can also be monitored and censored by parents, but is sophisticated enough to appeal to older kids.

The most powerful parental-control device may be Radio Frequency I.D. applications. RFID chips typically carry a small amount of data such as an identity number, which isn't actively broadcast, but can be picked up by scanners. Technology firms have found novel ways to attach them to children, to literally check them in and out of areas. Last year, some theme parks started offering customers RFID wristbands to help parents track kids around the park. Several schools have tested the devices, but not all have met with positive responses. A Sutter, Calif., high school tried using student RFID tags to measure attendance in February but was met with strenuous protests from parents who didn't want their children wearing the same technology used to track livestock.

VeriChip of Delray Beach, Fla., can implant RFID chips under the skin of people older than 12 to provide instant access to medical information. Nick Minicucci, who has a chip, also convinced his diabetic daughter to have one installed. "If she was unconscious somewhere, and couldn't tell people what was wrong with her, the wrong treatment, or no treatment could be fatal," he says. Far from the usual sci-fi fantasy, the chips can only be read by people with the protected scanners, and the medical information is hidden behind two passwords. Emergency-room staff in the eight U.S. hospitals with the system scan every unresponsive patient to check for the chip.

Similar technology, designed to reduce the 20,000 annual accidental infant-swapping incidents, stopped a 4-day-old boy from being abducted from the Presbyterian Hospital in Charlotte, N.C., in June. The system, which works by sounding a happy chime with the right match, and an angry chime with a swap, also works with readers placed at all major exits in a post-natal ward. When the baby boy was taken out hidden in a duffel bag, it triggered the alarm, and hospital staff responded by blocking all exits and checking bags.

In response to the success of the technology, California clothing designer Lauren Scott and RFID chipmaker Smartwear of San Diego plan to introduce pajamas and nightgowns with RFID chips sewn into the hems this fall. Families will be able to buy readers to put on key exits around the house, and add a \$500 attachment to the home-security system, which will set off an alarm if the tag passes through an exit.

But just because we can always find out where our kids are and what they're typing, should we? Some parents like Bozonyak think that modern dangers require modern solutions--especially when

kids are often more tech-savvy than their parents. "[Sentry's] really there to level the playing field between parents and kids," says Bozonyak. "It works without you being there."

But the idea that parenting can be done via a cell phone, and that constant monitoring is an innocent way to ensure safety, is drawing some criticism. Robert Butterworth, a Los Angeles psychologist who studies modern family life, believes that we may be replacing trust with gadgetry. "This technology is like training wheels, and by never letting them off, we're never seeing if they can ride alone." He does however suggest that when used the right way, some technology can help children and parents cope with disorders such as autism.

Butterworth also stresses that we don't yet know the effects of watching children closely all the time: "If you have a kid who has been in trouble for drinking, install a Breathalyzer or a tracker, if you have a kid who's skipping school, use GPS to make sure they're where they should be at 10 in the morning, but use it as a stick for problems, not just as part of a culture of surveillance."

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