

Overbearing Mama Bear

Over the last decade, technological advancements in mobile devices have revolutionized the way our society functions: we get directions from GPS maps, stream videos for news, and check our email all the time. Smart phones and other advancements have created new levels of efficiency and connectedness, but this comes at a cost. Some may argue, for example, that children and teenagers have become much more vulnerable to cyber predators. The internet provides a great deal of anonymity, allowing dishonest people to operate from behind a veil, or worse, to disguise themselves as people they are not. Betsy Landers, president of the National Parent Teacher Association, says “Predators now can prey on our kids online when they are totally unaware that they’re dealing with an adult.”¹

How can parents best protect and monitor their children’s online activity? Some parents are using special software that monitors their children’s social media accounts and web searches. One app, MamaBear, allows parents to “Discover when your kids get tagged in a photo or check-in[s] with friends at a location on Facebook and Instagram,” and “Learn when your kids make new friends on Facebook or Instagram and get alerted to bad language or signs of bullying”.² It even allows parents to track their children’s cellphone with GPS and find out if they are in a car that is traveling over the speed limit.

Another program called Web Watcher “logs every email, instant message, and keystroke” of the child’s mobile phone.³

Other parents, however, see MamaBear and other similar software programs as intrusive, claiming that it undermines the trust that exists between parents and their children. Many teens whose parents monitor their internet activity and social media accounts often create two accounts: one for parents to monitor, and another as a secret outlet for supervision-free activity. Perhaps more importantly, children may feel like they aren’t trusted or that their privacy is being invaded. Lynn Schofield Clark, the author of *The Parent App*, says, “When parents are engaged in these kind of monitoring activities, they end up being interpreted by their young people as spying.”⁴

Study Questions:

1. Are parental monitoring apps morally permissible?
2. In times of rapidly evolving technology and resulting safety concerns, what would be a morally permissible way to keep children safe? In other words, do new threats due to advanced technology change the permissible range of monitoring?
3. To what extent should parents be allowed to monitor their children’s activity? Is an intrusion of trust and privacy justified if it ensures the safety of the child?

¹<http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2012/11/21/165485240/know-what-your-kids-do-online-there-s-an-app-for-that>

²<http://mamabearapp.com/>

³<http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2012/11/21/165485240/know-what-your-kids-do-online-there-s-an-app-for-that>

⁴<http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2012/11/21/165485240/know-what-your-kids-do-online-there-s-an-app-for-that>

