



FALSE FREEDOM

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On a Sunday evening, a Johnston graduate decided to go to a bar with some friends to get drinks. Being under 21, the graduate turned off his location so his parents would be unable to see where he went. Soon after, the graduate got a call from his mother, annoyed and suspicious as she had been alerted that she could no longer see where he was. This process was not unfamiliar to the graduate, as he had been dealing with it for the past four years.

As technology is developing, parents have gained the ability to track their children using a variety of apps downloaded on a smartphone. Some just allow them to see the location of the phone, while others can tell the speed at which they are driving, how many times they pick up their phone, or even if they make abrupt stops or rapid accelerations. This concept of parents being able to see their child's every move has caused controversy regarding the privacy of teens.

For some parents, monitoring their child's location is simply a way to gain peace of mind. English teacher and parent of three Jeremy Fitzpatrick utilizes the Find My Friends app to occasionally check in on where his kids

are. "I'm not on it constantly, it's more, did he get to where he said he was going to go," Fitzpatrick said. "If he's not texting a response to us, we'll look, is he driving? It's just a check-up thing, it's not a constant, 'Where are you at? What are you doing?'"

For other parents, having the ability to see where their kids are is a matter of convenience. "Instead of having to text constantly, 'Where are you? What's going on? Why aren't you home yet?' There's been a lot of times with Madison [Dunn '20] that she's gotten delayed at golf practice or show choir, and I'll see that she's still there," mother of two Emily Dunlavey said. "Or, 'Oh, it's eight in the morning and she's still at home.' And I can text her and ask why she isn't at school."

Dunlavey's family uses Life360, which has many features other than just sharing locations. "I can see if her battery is dead, so that helps too," Dunlavey said. "When I worked nights, I could see that her battery was dead in the middle of the night so she either forgot to charge it or it's charging and she hasn't turned it back on yet, so she's not going to get an alarm to wake up. I think one night I set an alarm on Alexa while I was at work, remotely, to go off and wake her up when I saw her phone was dead."

Math teacher Richard Brooks and the rest of his family also uses Life360 to see each other's locations. "We never look to see where they are," Brooks said. "I think when we initially did it, that's what our kids were afraid of. I don't ever go out and look and see where you are. It's more of safety. Like one night, for example, Ben [Brooks '20] didn't come home on time. Ultimately, it was just fine, he had fallen asleep at a friend's house and the parents were there. But, when you're a half hour late from where you're supposed to, then we're gonna go on there and say, 'Where the heck are you?' So I think that's more of the reason why we chose to do it. So that in case something happens, there's another way to be aware at least where the phone is."

While parents may believe they are acting in the best interest of their child, this feeling rarely goes both ways. "I hate it," Ben Brooks '20 said. "It's so annoying, I wish they wouldn't do it. I feel like it's super controlling and

weird. I fought it, and I still do. It sucks, it feels like someone is watching me all the time."

This idea of being watched constantly, rather accurate or not, greatly decreases how much freedom teens feel that they have. "I think it's unfair and too controlling," Brooks said. "Parents should just trust their kids and give them some freedom without always having to be watched by their parents."

For both the Johnston graduate and Brooks, knowing that their parents track their location makes them feel as though they are not trusted. Fitzpatrick, though, tracks his kids even though he was adamant that he trusts them. "If we find out you're not where you're supposed to be, that's when we have an issue," Fitzpatrick said. "It's a trust issue, and the moment that trust is broken, then it's a bigger deal. But until that

"You guys talk about how free you are now. You're less free than we were. We had the ability to leave the house and our parents wouldn't know where we were."

-Michelle Applegate

happens, I'm going to trust him. And even with my other two kids. I will trust you as long as you say where you're going to be."

This idea of trusting kids but tracking them anyway is a big topic of debate around the issue. "I didn't track them because they were decent kids," mother of three Michelle Applegate said. "If they were trouble kids, I might have ended up tracking them. They never gave me a reason. There was trust there."

In the rare circumstances that Brooks does check his children's locations, he still trusts their judgement and gives them the benefit of the doubt. "If my son says he's going to go to Johnny's but I look at the app and see he's nowhere near Johnny's, I wouldn't confront him," Brooks said. "I trust that if he's not where he said he was, there's a reason for that."

Despite a parent having good intentions,

in her article "Should You Track Your Teen's Location?", New York Times author and psychologist Lisa Damour strongly enforces that location tracking can damage the relationship between parents and their kids. "Research shows that adolescents who believe their parents have invaded their privacy go on to have higher levels of conflict at home," Damour said. "And teenagers who resent being trailed digitally sometimes disable location features, take pains to 'spoof' their GPS, or leave their phones at friends' houses to throw parents off their scent."

'Spoofing' a location so that their parents cannot see where they are may seem like a good idea to the teen, but it also comes with downsides. "[My oldest daughter] had a tendency then, after I put the tracker on it, to leave her phone at school instead of taking it with her," Dunlavey said. "Which is more concerning. Because then if she needed help or anything, she wouldn't be able to call."

Despite him being at college two hours away, the graduate's mother still monitors his location. "She gets notifications every time I arrive at a different location," the graduate said. "She checks it quite often."

Dunlavey also monitors the location of her daughter in college, but for different reasons. "I'll check on her a couple times a week just to make sure she's moving around," Dunlavey said. "Or if I hear that someone got into a car accident or stabbed or something nearby, I'll look and see if she's moving and still alive. Rather than having to text her and ask if she's okay."

Considering Dunlavey's unique work schedule, her choice to track her kids was made with their wellbeing in mind. "When we first got the app, I was working nights and leaving them home alone," Dunlavey said. "So I put several measures into place to feel more comfortable leaving them home alone. Like getting a dog that barks when someone gets into the house and I put little alarms on the doors...Or when I was at work at midnight and someone wasn't home, I could look and see where they were. Because that's not okay. In the beginning, a lot of it was just because I was a single parent working nights, trying to keep tabs on everyone when I wasn't around."