



Position paper: child tracking devices

A tracking device is an electronic security mechanism which allows monitoring the location of a person or an object. Over the past years, many tracking devices have been developed enabling adults to monitor and locate their children. In the form of mobile phone tracking systems, key rings, watches, and micro-chips, these devices send a signal to a home base device that provides the adults with the real time location of their children. Most of these commercial products also keep track of where the child has been, so that it is possible to track the past locations and see exactly where they have been.

Missing Children Europe and its members are skeptical about the use and advertising of these commercial products, unless the circumstances absolutely require it, for the following main reasons:

1. False feeling of safety

Tracking devices can create a false feeling of safety for parents, giving the impression the child is safe simply thanks to the tracking device.

They bear the risk of diminishing parental responsibility; giving parents an excuse for not investing in a dialogue and relationship based on mutual trust with their children (especially teenagers), while relying on the devices to act as substitutes in ensuring the safety of the child.

Furthermore, these systems are not 100% reliable, and also easy to tamper, sabotage or misuse by malicious individuals.

2. Commercial interest vs the over-dramatisation of reality

Very often these tracking devices are sold by commercial companies, who present them as « guardian angels », as powerful answers to the worries of parents. Because of the significant commercial and financial interest the sale of such products represents, websites promoting tracking devices often provide false and inaccurate information to parents concerning the need for such tools. The promotion of the idea that kidnappers are everywhere and that the risk of a child being abducted is constantly increasing contributes to a feeling of fear and mistrust, which is not beneficial to the children and their overall positive development.



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3. Respect of children's rights & the best interest of the child

The use of tracking devices raises questions as to the best interest of the child, which is seen as a subject in need of protection only, and not as a holder of rights, including in particular those related to respect for his / her views (art 12 CRC), freedom of thought (art. 14 CRC) and privacy (art 16 CRC). Furthermore, the issue of consent could be raised: who will give the consent for the minor to be tracked? The minor himself, or the lawful guardian? Parents and guardians do not need the consent of the minor to put a tracking device in place. Children however have a right to their privacy.

4. Preventing harm and promoting alternative ways of protecting children

While situations can be different when it comes to the protection of children in specific circumstances and while certain situations of vulnerability may require extreme measures, Missing Children Europe promotes both prevention and the use of alternative means for parents to keep their children safe from going missing.

First and foremost, parents are encouraged to teach their children how to stay safe: not to trust unknown people, when lost go towards an adult with a child or someone in a uniform, learn parents' number and missing children hotline's number. No matter the age of the child, talking about safety is part of the educational process: it is certainly helpful to teach our children that there are potential risks in society, and that not everyone necessarily has good intentions. However, it is important to encourage children to learn how to respect agreements, and to build their sense of safety and security, rather than enhancing a sense of fear and permanent danger that would not benefit to their development.

Missing Children Europe and its members emphasise the importance of investing in prevention, without disseminating a negative and alarming message that could let parents think that child abduction is so common that the use of tracking devices would be necessary to avoid children going missing or that this devices hold the ultimate key for child safekeeping.

Should the circumstances require the use of a child tracking device (such as, for instance, in cases of children in need of medication whose life can be at risk when lost or children with communication – hearing and/or speech deficits - or sight impairments), Missing Children Europe promotes a holistic approach that entails the use of the device within a broader system of support for the child and the family, and highlights the importance of developing a sense of responsibility by parents, educators, authorities and ultimately by every citizen in our society.