

They put microchips in their employees. Now this company is helping parents track their children

News headlines about school shootings, missing person cases and random acts of violence can leave people feeling as though the threat of chaos is ever-present.



5 That can explain why, for some parents, the temptation to check in on a child is equally persistent.

10 Patrick McMullen, president of Three Square Market, a Wisconsin-based technology company known for microchipping employees, thinks his firm has developed a solution: a new app called “Mom I Am Ok.”

15 Designed for family members, the app will launch this month and allow parents to set agreed-upon “check-ins” with their children or loved ones. Those check-ins arrive in the form of push notifications asking whether the phone’s owner is safe. If the recipient doesn’t respond “yes” to the notification, the app can determine everywhere that person has been and deliver that information to loved ones or law enforcement officials. If people are separated from their phones, however, they can no longer be effectively tracked.

20 Using geofencing – a virtual boundary created for a real-world area – the app can also alert a parent when their child has left a particular area. The app will cost \$9 per month, he said. (...)

25 The Mom I Am Ok app is the latest among a growing list of affordable surveillance apps marketed to family members who want to keep tabs on their loved ones. Tens of millions of people use similar apps, many of which promise to help them track their children’s location in real time, as well as their recent movements, sometimes for up to 48 hours. (...)

Experts say these apps could be useful to police searching for a missing child, but could also be subject to abuse by overzealous authorities seeking evidence in a criminal case.

Police worldwide are in the midst of a technology revolution, said Maria Haberdorf, a professor of police science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City.

30 She said she foresees potential conflicts arising if authorities use these kinds of apps to collect evidence against a missing teenager, for example, who may be involved in illegal activity.

By Peter Holley, adapted from *www.washingtonpost.com*, September 19th, 2018