

TIPS FOR SAFE GPS LOCATION-SHARING

Most "smart phones" and even some regular cellphones allow you to run location-sharing software that uses the phone's GPS capability to let friends and family know your exact location. There are lots of great uses for this technology: It can be an easy way to find your friends and be found by them; it can reduce anxiety for loved ones by keeping them posted on your whereabouts; and there are some fun games and activities that take advantage of it, such as scavenger hunts and services that track how often you visit certain establishments. These services are not for children under 13 and many require users to be 18, so make sure you're permitted to use an app or service, and – parents – we recommend that you ask your kids if they're using these services and how.

Choose what's best for you. Some location-sharing services are games that let you give a shout-out when you've turned up at a particular spot. Others show where you are all the time or for a period of time you set. Still others continue to share your location until you change the setting. Be sure you know exactly how your service shares your location.

Know the service's privacy features. All services have privacy controls. Definitely get to know them and use these features to be sure that you have complete control over who knows your location.

Know who your friends are. Some location services operate like Facebook and other social network sites, where you invite and accept friends. This means people can search to see if you're online and add you as a friend. It's important to remember that sharing your location with people you've never met in real life is risky, so you should carefully manage friend requests and share your location only with people you know and trust. Make sure any service you choose gives you complete control over who sees your whereabouts.

Syncing with other services. If your location-sharing app syncs up with Facebook, Twitter or another service, you may be broadcasting your whereabouts to a lot of people without even knowing it. You might even be sharing your location with people you don't know. Check to see if your service does sync with other services and be sure to manage this very carefully. It's probably best to turn off this feature and just use the service's own sharing tools so you can reveal your location only to people you feel comfortable with.

Check back often. Some services automatically stop sending your location after a period of time, but others will send it forever – until you stop it. Review your contact list periodically and delete anyone to whom you no longer feel comfortable revealing your location.

Can others disclose your location. There are services that allow others to “check you in” to a location. Check any location or social networking services you use to see if they offer this feature and, if so, learn how they work and the privacy features for them. Think about whether you want to keep others from finding you and never reveal other people’s location without checking with them first.

Updating parents. Location-based services are a great way for teens to let parents know where they are without having to call or text. Check-ins ease worries so they don't have to follow your every move. If you’re heading home late at night, you can also use a service like Glympse to share your location as you drive, so they'll know if you have car trouble or get stuck in traffic. Informed parents are happy parents.