# Gen Z’s location sharing sparks new debates on privacy, connection and mental health



Trends may ebb and flow, and technology continues to evolve, yet the essence of teenage social interaction remains strikingly similar across generations. Recently, a trend that has surfaced among adolescents—and one that has raised eyebrows among adults—is the willingness to share their real-time locations. This practice not only embodies a shift in social dynamics, but also highlights significant issues of safety, privacy, and mental health.

According to a recent survey by the tracking app Life360, Generation Z is 70% more inclined than other age groups to share their whereabouts with friends. A remarkable 94% of those surveyed expressed that location sharing enhances their lives. With the rise of social media platforms facilitating this trend, Snapchat's location-sharing feature, Snap Map, boasts over 400 million monthly active users—a testament to its popularity. With Instagram reportedly working on a similar feature, the social landscape is undoubtedly shifting towards greater connectivity through location sharing.

Despite the allure of staying connected, many adults, including Leigh McInnis, executive director of Newport Healthcare, express concerns regarding privacy and safety. “While my immediate instinct is related to protection of privacy and boundaries,” she noted in an interview, “I realise that this impulse is likely more related to my generational identity and discomfort with technology and tracking than the social needs and preferences of today’s teens and young adults.” This sentiment reflects a growing divide between generations, underscoring the need for understanding rather than judgment regarding new social behaviours.

Experts suggest that for many adolescents, location sharing is primarily about connection rather than mere safety. Dr. Cameron Caswell, an adolescent psychologist and host of the podcast *Parenting Teens with Dr. Cam*, shared that her daughter, along with other teens, finds joy in knowing their friends' whereabouts. “It’s a little about safety, but mostly because it’s just fun to see what each other is doing,” she explained. This reflects a continuation of trends in digital interaction, where posting updates and sharing experiences has always been part of teenage life—morphing from Myspace statuses to real-time updates on Snapchat and Life360.

However, alongside the perceived benefits lie significant risks—both emotional and physical. Cheryl Groskopf, an anxiety, trauma, and attachment therapist based in Los Angeles, noted that sharing locations can inadvertently intensify feelings of anxiety and social exclusion. “There's comfort in knowing where your people are, especially in a world where teens constantly feel like they could get left out, replaced or excluded,” she said. Yet, this comfort is fragile, leading to an ongoing need for reassurance and, in some cases, unhealthy social dynamics.

Research indicates that this trend can engender challenges such as FOMO (fear of missing out) and unwanted social comparison. Constantly checking where friends are can become a source of stress—teenagers may find themselves spiral into overthinking or anxiety when they notice others socialising without them. As Groskopf pointed out, such behaviours could potentially lay the groundwork for controlling relationships where tracking turns into a method of emotional surveillance rather than a means of ensuring safety.

Furthermore, there exists a marked gender disparity in the use of location-sharing. Statistics from Life360 indicate that 70% of Gen Z women feel their well-being is enhanced by sharing their location. While this can foster a sense of safety, it also raises alarm bells, particularly regarding the potential for misuse. Dr. Caswell observed that girls are often more vulnerable, where location sharing, while intended to cultivate connection, can facilitate unwanted attention or harassment, particularly from acquaintances or ex-partners.

As conversations around safe sharing become increasingly paramount, experts stress the importance of establishing boundaries and consent. Groskopf emphasised that sharing should only occur within a framework of genuine agreement. “Safe tracking only works when it’s not being weaponised to regulate someone else’s fear, jealousy or insecurity,” she asserted. Such discussions are vital not only among peers but also between parents and teenagers.

Encouraging families to initiate open conversations can help demystify location sharing, allowing teenagers to articulate their motivations—whether for safety, connection, or social pressure. By fostering an environment where setting boundaries is not only accepted but encouraged, families can contribute to healthier relationships with technology.

In a world where digital transparency has become the norm, teenagers must navigate both the benefits and potential pitfalls that come with location sharing, armed with the knowledge and support to do so responsibly. As platforms like Snap Map and Life360 continue to evolve, the conversation around their use will need to adapt, ensuring that while teens strive for connection, they also safeguard their well-being and privacy.

## Reference Map:

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2. <https://www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-happy-parents-tracking-location-apps-life360-2023-10> - A Business Insider article from October 2023 discusses how Generation Z is increasingly comfortable with parents using location-sharing apps like Life360 to monitor their whereabouts. The piece highlights that 94% of Gen Z sees the benefits of location sharing, with more than half regarding such apps as synonymous with safety. The article also notes that 72% of Gen Z female respondents believe their physical well-being benefits from location sharing. The trend is linked to rising levels of anxiety among younger generations, with experts suggesting that during uncertain times, this generation craves the added layer of security that location sharing provides.
3. <https://time.news/location-sharing-apps-a-hidden-danger-for-young-people/> - An article from Time News explores the growing popularity of location-sharing apps among young people and the associated risks. It discusses how platforms like Snapchat's Snap Map and Life360 are widely used by teens and young adults to stay connected and coordinate meet-ups. However, the piece also highlights the dangers, including stalking and coercive control, citing the tragic case of Lilie James, a 21-year-old water polo coach who was murdered by an ex-boyfriend who tracked her movements using Snapchat. The article emphasizes the need for awareness and caution regarding the potential misuse of location-sharing features.
4. <https://www.fbcwfamily.com/post/life360> - This article examines the rise of location-sharing apps, particularly Life360, and their impact on Generation Z. It notes that 89% of Americans believe location sharing benefits their lives, with Gen Z leading at 94%. The piece highlights that 54% of Gen Z believe it's necessary for parents to ask their children to share their location at all times, especially in emergencies or when traveling. The article also discusses how teens use location sharing to look out for each other, ensuring friends get home safely or arrive at a destination without trouble. However, it also addresses the potential downsides, such as increased anxiety and the risk of surveillance.
5. <https://www.insighttrendsworld.com/post/insight-of-the-day-how-many-gen-z-are-sharing-their-location-on-socials> - An article from InsightTrendsWorld discusses the prevalence of location-sharing among Generation Z on social media platforms. It notes that Gen Z frequently uses location-sharing features, such as Snapchat’s Snap Map, to share real-time updates with friends and family. The piece highlights that location sharing has become a constant, passive feature in their digital interactions and reflects a shift towards constant digital transparency and social connection. The article also mentions that many Gen Z members have grown up with parental tracking apps, making them comfortable with sharing their location.
6. <https://wiredgorilla.com/location-sharing-apps-are-enabling-domestic-violence-but-young-people-arent-aware-of-the-danger/> - An article from WIREDGORILLA discusses how location-sharing apps, like Snapchat's Snap Map and Life360, are shaping communication among younger people. While these apps offer convenience and a sense of security, they can also enable stalking and other forms of coercive control. The piece highlights the case of Lilie James, a 21-year-old water polo coach who was murdered by an ex-boyfriend who tracked her movements using Snapchat. The article emphasizes that many young people are unaware of the potential dangers associated with location-sharing apps and underscores the need for increased awareness and caution.
7. <https://www.emarketer.com/content/location-sharing-now-social-norm-users-choose-connection-over-privacy-concerns> - An article from eMarketer discusses how location sharing has become a common way for people to stay connected, with 41% of US adults sharing their location with at least one person. It notes that two-thirds (65%) of Gen Zers share their location, compared with 45% of millennials and 42% of Gen Xers. The piece highlights that while location sharing started as a safety measure, it is increasingly used as a way to socialize. The article also mentions that over half (52%) share their location with a partner or spouse, while 20% would be uncomfortable if a partner or spouse asked them to do so.