Children need confidence -- not a GPS chip
By Marjorie Cortez

08/17/2002
Deseret News
Page A09
Copyright (c) 2002 Deseret News Publishing Co.
When our dog ran off for the umpteenth time last fall, my father-in-law cracked that we ought to fit our four-legged friend with a GPS chip.
He was half-joking, but the prospect was certainly intriguing. My brother uses Global Positioning Satellite technology in his work as a land surveyor, and he is always raving about its accuracy. It's remarkable technology, and I'm all for any gadget that can enhance the way we work or live.
But I'm having some difficulty with the notion of using GPS as a tool to locate your child. Some of the gizmos I've seen advertised lately have been fashioned to look like wrist watches. They enable parents to use the Internet or a phone to ascertain in about a minute their child's location within a few feet. Wow.
I suppose there are parents out there who already use this technology. Given this summer's steady stream of media reports of child abductions, there will likely be an expanded market for this kind of tool. I'm not so troubled by people availing themselves to technology for this purpose as I am the commercial exploitation of parents' fears.
There are any number of products and services sold under the guise of helping us protect our kids. Last spring, my daughter got a flier at school advertising fingerprint identification cards. Our child's fingerprints would be laminated on a card with a new photograph. The service was pitched to the kids that cards could be used for many purposes. Since these records have no government sanction, I'm not sure how they would be used except in the worst-case scenario.
Besides, many law enforcement agencies will fingerprint children at no cost. Frankly, I'd rather entrust my child to someone in law enforcement than a private enterprise that might sell personal information divulged on the card to a broker who compiles and sells marketing lists.
Even then, I worry about the message we give our kids when we ask them for their fingerprints. I was sickened to hear a small boy on local television explain to a reporter that he was being fingerprinted in case he was killed. I'm sure his parents had good intentions, but I couldn't help think that child would have been better off not to have such horrible thoughts in his head.
Then there are DNA sampling kits. I haven't tried this, but I suspect there is an ample amount of DNA on my child's toothbrush and hairbrush at any given time to extract a sufficient sample if police needed it.
When I look back at this summer, I will think of it as the summer of the missing girls. Statistically speaking, there haven't been more child abductions this summer, but we're certainly more aware of them. The greater awareness, both through the traditional media and the "Amber Alert" system, has resulted in the safe return of some these girls and the recovery of the remains of others.

I have marveled at the pluck and resourcefulness of some of these children.
Imagine 7-year-old Erica Pratt of Philadelphia bound, blindfolded and left in a dirty basement for nearly 24 hours. Somehow she mustered the wherewithal to gnaw through the duct tape and make her way to freedom.
Think of the moxie of the teenage girls from Lancaster, Calif., who attempted to kill their kidnapper by stabbing him and hitting him on the head with a whiskey bottle. The kidnapper had nothing to lose and would have killed the girls if officers had not arrived, police said.
When I grew up, I was taught to respect my elders. I was also instructed not to talk to strangers. I honestly don't know if I would have had the self-confidence to try to save myself had I been kidnapped as a child. The instruction my parents gave me didn't exactly empower me to act on my own. I don't say this to be critical of my parents. It was a different time and place.
Now, kids need to be taught to trust their instincts and extract themselves from any circumstance that doesn't feel right. They need to know that parents and other trusted adults will listen to their concerns and act on them. This type safety net will serve a child well in any number of situations that come up in the course of growing up. Best of all, it's a gift parents can give their children for free. No satellite technology or fancy gadgets required.
Marjorie Cortez is a Deseret News editorial writer. E-mail her at marjorie@desnews.com.

Copyright © 2000 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.