

SCREEN AGERS



Last year Snapchat introduced Snap Map, a cartoon-looking map with Bitmojis of users positioned at their real-life locations. At first, I thought this would not catch on because kids would know that sharing their location widely is not safe. I was wrong. The Snap Map function is used by most teens who use the app.

It goes one step further than just showing where the kid is, it also can virtually show what they are actually doing. A Bitmoji is selected by Snapchat to represent what the user is doing. If they are at a concert or listening to music, the Bitmoji might have headphones on. If they are at the gym or exercising, their Bitmoji might have exercise clothes and sneakers. If they are asleep, it shows them with little zzz's or in a bed. There's also a function called Map Explore that allows you to scroll through the map to see where your friends are headed. These updates are generated by Snapchat users moving around rather than typing in their locations. You can actually watch as your friend moves from one place to another.

The positive way to look at this is that some kids use the map to find their friends to meet up with them in real life, and encouraging real-life interaction is often a good thing.

But, in no uncertain terms, I want to say that I am concerned that so many of our kids and teens are pinpointing people's exact location, including home addresses and street names. This raises a lot of red flags. As we know, the word "friend" can mean anything from a true bestie to a complete stranger.

Keeping our kids safe online is no easy task and Snap Map makes it even harder. It not only compromises the privacy and security of the kids using it, but it can also exacerbate feelings of being left out. Imagine you are at home using Snapchat and you see a group of your friends at someone else's house on Snap Map. "Why wasn't I invited," you think. Whether it was intentional or not, the feeling of being left out is an immediate blow.

When you first activate Snap Map, you are asked if you want to share your location with all of your friends, some of your friends or remain private in Ghost Mode. If they have already started using Snap Map, they can change their privacy setting to Ghost Mode by going to the photo taking mode and pinching their screen to get to Snap Map. Once there, they click on the settings wheel and select Ghost Mode to turn off

location sharing. They will be able to see where other people are but no one will see them.

I firmly believe that Snap Map has more downsides than upsides. The challenge is that many youths do use it. Therefore, when talking with your kids and teens about this, I suggest entering the conversation from a place of curiosity rather than a place of heavy-handedness. This will increase the chance that they come to understand that the downsides outweigh any upsides. It might be that you create a rule specifying Ghost Mode even if they disagree with it. They might not be happy at the moment, but chances are someday they will be thankful for the decision.

Here are some questions to get you started:

- What positives do think there are with Snap Map?
- What negatives do you think there are?
- How is safety compromised if someone can see where you are and what you are doing? If someone can determine your home address?
- Many kids and teens do indeed use the Ghost Mode (my two teens do) and do you think this makes sense for you? Even if they do not understand it at this point, you can tell them that you want the rule to be that they are in Ghost Mode.

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Warmly,



Delaney Ruston, MD

Screenagers' Filmmaker

www.screenagersmovie.com

415-450-9585

