

AirTag Tracking

An AirTag is a tracking device developed by Apple. AirTag is designed to act as a key finder, which helps people find personal objects.

During recent school visits by schools in Cornwall, children have been given AirTags by parents.

Concerns

Children having/wearing AirTags during school visits presents several safeguarding concerns:

1. The Airtags are not secure and after 2 hours of proximity with an apple device their location will appear including the recent route of that tracker. In some cases, it will allow that Apple device to 'claim' the tracker so all information can be seen. This can occur with the known adults in the group, but it is conceivable that this information could be acquired by a nefarious party, for example if children and staff are travelling on public transport; spending a morning at one location... In cases where a child routinely wears a tracker this would provide 'pattern of life' i.e., where they live, go to school, places they play, what time they might go to the shops or a friend's house etc. Whilst on a school trip it is also worthy of note, that by proxy, any parents who have send children with AirTags are not just tracking their child but the entire group of children and staff.
2. The device that receives the information from the tracker can set an alarm to go off on the AirTag so that the child with the AirTag is identifiable.
3. School staff are appropriately experienced for the visit and their attention should be on the safety of the group and educational input rather than having extra safeguarding concerns about the safety of individual children and the whole group. This decision also is detrimental to the trust and communication between school and parents/carers, and erodes the essential bond for informed consent and operating in '*loco parentis*'.
4. Gathering detailed information about the route of a group who are on a school visit is effectively stalking a group of school children around the town/city they are visiting. The sharing of any of this route information presents a significant danger to all members of the group should the tracking information get into the wrong hands.

Learning

In the past few years, the parental tracking of children has become more common place. However, an important distinction is the difference between what a parent may want to do to increase a sense of safety around their child in their own time (walking by themselves to school or playing in the park for instance) and when their child is on an organised school visit. Discussions about AirTags will now be part of Parents' Meetings about residential visits. Of course, parents/carers need to feel assured that the school has safety covered and have the opportunity to ask questions, so their consent is informed. They should also appreciate the school staff's experience and care and if they are happy to entrust their child into the school's care. Tracking should not be necessary.

Once the school visit starts, regular updates are posted safely on the school's online platform. It is part of growing up and a child's experience at primary school for the child and parent to have some time away and it's important that the school staff are trusted to do their jobs. If the need arises, for something medical for example, the school will phone the parent. If all is well then

there is no need to make contact as this will distract staff from their duties on the trip, and even if not intended, this has the underlying message to the staff that their care and competence is not fully trusted.

It is good practice to post any updates after visits/events i.e., don't post an image during the day of the group at Trafalgar Square, wait until the evening, or next day or even after the visit. This reduces anxiety about plan changes and gets away from a culture of constantly checking for updates. It has the added benefit of being historical useless information for anyone with ill intent.

If the child knows they are being tracked that may leave them feeling uncomfortable and untrusted. This does not support the shared goal of school and parent to bring the child to a state of independence. The purpose of school residential visits is often to build independent thinking, resilience responsibility and confidence. Wearing a tracker doesn't support this.

Tracking information in the wrong hands would pose a serious safeguarding risk. This could be an opportunist threat or targeted over a longer period of time. Many tracking devices and apps also back up tracking data in the Cloud, so it is also vulnerable to being hacked or sold.

For the most part trackers provide a feeling of security but little real-world risk mitigation. It is important to remember that it is the tracker one is tracking not the subject. A savvy child that doesn't want their parents to know where they are, will leave their tracker/phone at a friend's house (and the parents probably won't check because the tracking information shows them in the right place). If the unthinkable occurred and a child was abducted, the first thing the perpetrator will do, is check for and dispose of tracking devices.

Taken in combination, the trust erosion between school, parents and children, the potential safeguarding issues and the limited risk mitigation benefit, it would be right to challenge why it would be appropriate to track a child on a school visit.

Additional Notes on Tracking

The National Guidance "4.3d Parental Consent & Informing Parents" says this on tracking;

Electronic Trackers

Sometimes parents consider providing their child with an electronic tracker, or tracking phone app, with or without the child's or establishment's knowledge. Although the motivation may be an understandable anxiety about the whereabouts of their child during a visit, this should normally be discouraged. Trackers can introduce:

- *Mistrust between parents and leaders, and tensions between parents who choose to use trackers and those who don't.*
- *Safeguarding risks, e.g., if an unauthorised person is able to track a child;*
- *A reduction in participants' real or perceived independence, the development of which may be an aim of the visit. The use (or not) of trackers by parents may need to be covered in an establishment policy and/or code of conduct to be agreed by parents and participants, in the same way as is done for mobile phones and other technology.*