



New phone service may allow parents locate children

CATHERINE CLEARY

The average teenager's most indispensable accessory, the mobile phone, is set to become a surveillance device that will allow parents to pinpoint their children's whereabouts at any time.

A Dublin security firm is to offer parents a service allowing them to track their child's movements through the location of the child's mobile phone.

The company, Top Security, is planning to launch the service early next month. It has been surveying parents to ascertain how often they ring their children on their mobiles to find out where they are.

Outlining the proposed service, the firm said it could offer parents "peace of mind in knowing where their children are without bothering them with telephone calls".

Using a password supplied

by the security company, a parent will be able to log on to a website and find their child's phone on a map to within metres of the phone's location.

When contacted by *The Irish Times*, the company was not willing to talk in detail about the service until its official launch next month.

As part of the survey, parents have been asked whether they would be willing to pay €100 a year for the proposed Toplocate phone service.

Any such surveillance service would require the parents to inform the child that they were to be monitored.

The company is also planning to send regular text messages to the child's mobile phone to tell them their phone is part of the location service for parents.

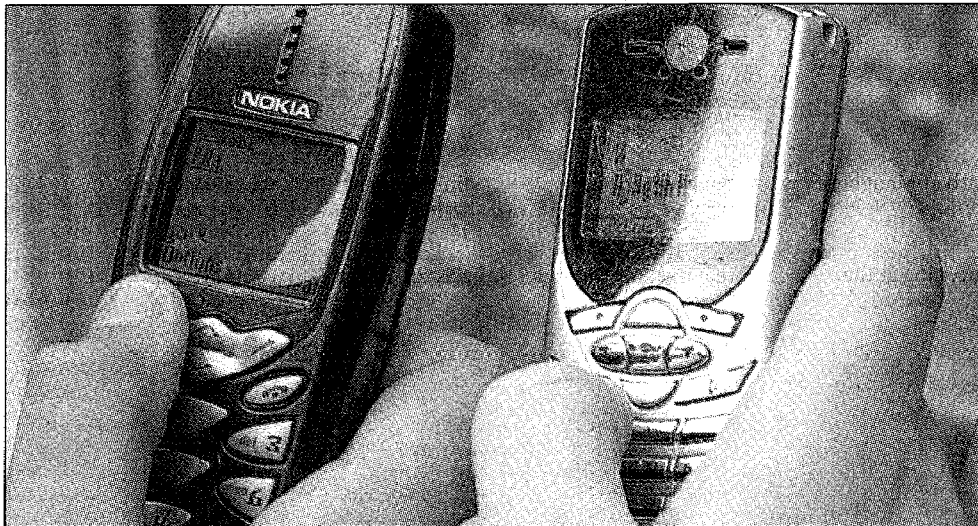
However, unlike the regular parental text message or phone calls, the child will not know when or how often a parent

checks their whereabouts.

Ireland recently passed the point where there are now more mobile phones than people in the State, with multiple phone ownership accounting for this. A recent survey found that over 90 per cent of 12- to 18-year-olds own a mobile phone.

Telecommunications base stations track the location of mobile phones as soon as they are switched on. Phone records on the movements of mobile phone handsets are increasingly being used by gardai to determine the whereabouts of suspects in criminal cases.

Giving a phone to a friend, leaving it on the bus or turning off the handset would all frustrate any possible parental spying. However, given the lifeline status of a phone in most teenagers' worlds, the option of the off switch is considered unlikely.



Texting on mobile phones. Parents may soon track their children through their mobiles.