

Are video monitors putting babies under surveillance?

I get a rather astonishing number of pitches from tech companies seeking visibility in the dad and parenting space online, and it's very cool. Lots of interesting products and innovations. After all, us parents need all the help we can get, and if it's in the shape of a gadget, well, we like our smartphones and Internet, right, so how can anything that taps into that zeitgeist not be good?



When [Lorex Technology](#) sent me their interactive [Live View baby monitor](#) I was interested in exploring its uses, even though I don't have a baby any more, my youngest is 8. Eight? How did she get to be that old so fast? Ah, that's a separate topic...

Anyway, when we had babies around the house, our strategy was either to have them with us, even if they were sleeping, or to use a cheapo baby monitor, a two part audio mic and speaker setup. You know what I'm talking about, it's the downfall of many parents who sneak into the baby's room for a quick tete-a-tete during parties, not realizing that the monitor's still broadcasting. We actually used to be able to tune in to the neighbors baby monitor for a while, which was, um, interesting. But not so much about the baby itself...

Even at that level, though, there was a kind of **creepy vibe** about surveillance for just the reason I'm joking about in the previous paragraph: it's useful to be able to go into a different room from the baby and darn useful for the baby to get used to at least occasionally waking up without a parent around (did I, a self-avowed "attachment parent", just say that?) but is monitoring the right solution, versus just listening for their cry?

Baby monitors evolve and our second baby monitor had an LED indicator light so that you could then trust the device and simply keep an eye on the lights to see whether there was something

going on in the remote spot. Useful if you don't want the white noise of the device when, say, watching a movie. Or making out.

And so, it's no surprise that the newest generation of devices are video monitors. After all, if you want to listen to your baby breathing even when you're not in the room, surely you'd also adore being able to watch their little sleeping figure on a tiny screen whenever you want?

Actually, I'll admit, there's something sublime and heart-warming about watching a sleeping baby. And if they're a fussy baby, I think that sublimeness is even greater. Finally, your tiny angel, peaceful and relaxed.

What makes the Live View monitor interesting, though, is that it's a two-way audio system too. That means if you hear baby crying and see him/her wiggling around, you can murmur "it's okay, honey" to the monitor device and your voice will come out of the speaker built into the camera end of the device. Kinda a little weird.

My general approach to testing things is to give them to my kids and see what they make of it, and it took about ten seconds for my son to cotton on to the idea of stealth surveillance and quietly go upstairs and set it in his big sister's bedroom.

me: "Um, why would you want to see her sleeping?"

him: "No, we can hear what she talks about and you can check to see if she's doing homework!"

me: "That's creepy."

I thought his idea was interesting in as much as we adults are continually decrying the loss of privacy in our increasingly public and surveilled world, and here's my son immediately recognizing the benefit of having a spycam in someone's personal space. Youth, of course, are way less conscious of privacy than us parents, as is immediately obvious when you see what they're willing to post and talk about on The Facebooks compared to those of us that have, um, been around for a while.

But he did accomplish one thing: he made me think about whether I would actually use a live video monitor with two way audio — or an inevitable upgrade to two-way video too — as a way to keep tabs on my baby. I think I would, but I'd be a bit leery about it and want one with an encrypted communications channel. It's one thing to realize the neighbors can listen to your baby crying on the radio and another entirely to think that they could be watching whatever the camera sees, and sharing that on YouTube, Facebook, whatever.

Oh, and we did get to enjoy A- looking at the camera contraption, then getting really big in the camera while saying "really?" and unplugging it. Somewhat amusing!

The second part of the question is then **when do you stop using a monitoring device?** When they can walk? Talk? Figure out how to hack it so you see reruns of *I Love Lucy*? My sense is that for me it'd be really young. When they're "helpless" it's useful to keep tabs on your baby

while having the freedom to move around your house and yard, but when they can hop out of bed and come find you? I imagine you're probably ready to disable the device.

So what do you think? Would you — or do you — use a video baby monitor like the Live View (which is a pretty darn nice device, btw) or do you want just audio, or are you an old-school type who thinks you should just keep an ear open for their cries or has them within arm's reach at all times?

GoFatherhood - Dave Taylor requested a demo of the Lorex LIVE View for a story on monitoring sick children. He covered on Wednesday, May 23rd:

<http://gofatherhood.com/2012/05/are-video-monitors-putting-babies-under-surveillance/>.