My son is off the leash. When he starts middle school next week, he will have the house to himself after school on the days when I am not working from home.

I could let him revel in this preadolescent milestone where he gets to play Splatoon 2 all afternoon with no one yelling at him. Or, I could fill my house with smart devices and watch him do whatever it is an 11-year-old does when he thinks he is alone.

Sure, he could pick up the phone and call me to let me know he has arrived home, but why rely on such an archaic option when I could instead turn my front door into Big Mother?

I could install a keyless lock, like Kevo by Kwikset, and receive a text message when he unlocks it. With a digital home security system, like SimpliSafe, I could get an alert that he has disarmed the system and a video clip of him walking in. I could use SimpliSafe door sensors to warn me if he opens anything off limits — that will keep him out of the cookie drawer.

With a microphone-enabled camera, like Canary, I could talk to him from the mantle. Imagine his reaction when he hears my disembodied voice emanating from a little box ordering him to put down the Nintendo Switch.

Teen rebellion
While parents of young children have long used nanny cams to keep tabs on baby sitters, companies are now marketing these products to parents of older children, too.

This time the camera is pointed not at the untrustworthy caregiver, but at the potentially rebellious adolescent.

“Parents use it to better understand when they [kids] come and go, what they’re doing,” said Bob Stohrer, chief marketing officer for Canary.

These new surveillance options come at a time of heightened angst about parental supervision. In her memoir Small Animals: Parenthood in the Age of Fear, released in August, Kim Brooks chronicles being charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor after she briefly left her small child alone in a car. She argues that her odyssey through the criminal justice system was a product of a culture convinced that our children are in a constant state of peril and only a vigilant parent can protect them.

“When we are living in an age of fear,” she writes, “we are living in an age of control.”

Parents use it to better understand when they come and go, what they’re doing, what time they go to sleep, when they have friends over,” said Bob Stohrer, chief marketing officer for Canary.

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“We are living in an age of fear,” she writes. Most of the dangers our children face — a changing climate, a vanishing middle class, spiraling health care costs — are beyond our control. And so our grip on the things we think we can control — like what our children do with their afternoons — grows tighter.

Gone are the days of riding your bike around the neighbourhood on your own until dusk. A 2014 Reason-Rupe poll found that 68% of Americans thought that a 9-year-old should not be allowed to play in a park unsupervised, and just over half of Americans thought a 12-year-old deserved such independence.

Since we are expected to always be watching even when we can’t, we look to technology to solve the impossible.

“The more you engage in this sort of fear-driven buying and reacting, the more scared and worried and distrustful you’re likely to become,” said Barry Glassner, author of The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things.

Yet, our children are alone sometimes, and technology can help us know when they have gotten home safely. A microphone-enabled camera could make it easier to help children with homework or to intervene in a sibling dispute.