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# PROTECTING CHILDREN

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It is very shocking when the media reports on the abuse of a child or an abduction. Rare as this type of event is, it makes all of us as parents more acutely aware of the responsibility of keeping our children safe.

There are multiple risks and it is impossible to protect a child from all dangers. However vigilant we are, they will hurt themselves when they are small and they will get into scrapes when they are older. What we can do as parents is to minimise those risks. One of the big safety issues for parents is around letting their child out.

In families where children grow up with the a rule that the children need at all times to discuss what they want to do and where they want to go that will be accepted as the norm. Give children reasons when they aren't allowed to do something. Even younger children should know why a request is agreed to or turned down. As they get older there should be a lot more negotiation with explanations as to why they are or are not allowed to do something. At all times it is important to listen carefully to the child or young person's perspective.

The challenge for parents is judging when a child is able to take the next step towards a little more independence. There needs to be a weighing up of the possible pitfalls and how ready your child is to deal with it. Give yourself time to consider if it is particularly hard to make a decision.

Children can be more responsible than we sometimes give them credit for. However, it is always wise to talk through the 'what if's' so that they know what to do if things don't work out as planned

**Q**

**My daughter is twelve and we live a bit out of town. She wants to go into Belfast with her friend on her birthday. I'm really unsure about it but she says her friend has been in lots of times.**

**A**

Whether you agree this time or later you have to start somewhere. It is good that her friend knows the town, and presumably you know this friend.

You could begin by taking them both in (always checking with the friend's parents that it is OK to do that) and letting them go off on their own for a while. Give them an agreed time to meet you, stressing the importance of them remembering that if you 'do your own thing' and are in town yourself you would be on hand should they need you. Your daughter probably wants to show you that you can trust her, which is all important to any young person. Make sure she knows she can contact you on your mobile should she need you and try not to text her every ten minutes. As well as the enjoyment it will be good for her confidence.

