

# Out alone

Your guide to keeping  
your child safe



Out with you, out alone,  
or taking part in activities

NSPCC 

As a mum or dad, looking after your child is your number one priority. This booklet is about how you can keep your child safe when they are away from home and alone.



It is not always possible to be with your child constantly; there will be times when you and your child are apart. How can you keep your toddler safe when they tend to wander off? How do you make sure that your child is safe when taking part in community activities? And what should you do if you see a distressed child?

It is difficult to set an exact age when it is safe for children to be out alone. Getting the balance between independence and safety can be difficult. Here, we've collected the best advice from professionals as well as practical tips from parents to help you prepare your child for being out on their own.



No matter how much you teach your child about safety, remember the limits of their age and maturity.

# What's your view?

Advice for parents on when to allow children to be out alone.



## Going to the shops alone

"We live in a flat and it's not much fun being stuck indoors, so I sometimes let them go to the shops on their own or to the playground until dinner is ready. It stops them getting under my feet and is probably good for them."

**Sian, mother of Gwilym, seven, and Erylis, five.**

**NSPCC adviser** "We agree that children need to have time outside to play, but your two children are too young to be out unsupervised. We know that children under eight can't judge speed and distance of moving vehicles. They still need your help when crossing roads. If the playground is out of sight from you, there is a risk that they may get injured and need your help, or be subjected to unwanted attention from older children (bullying) or even targeted by adults. Can you team up with other parents nearby and take turns to supervise the children outside?"

## Find out more

**Child Accident Prevention Trust** provides information on accident prevention  
[www.capt.org.uk](http://www.capt.org.uk)  
020 7608 3828

**Kidscape** provides information on bullying and keeping children safe  
[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)  
08451 205 204

## Wanting to protect...

"Sonia is a good girl and is working hard for her exams. She is hoping to go to university. We don't let her go out alone; she is dropped and collected from the school gate and we wouldn't let her go to the corner shop, or out with her friends to town."

**Kris, father of Sonia, 14.**

**NSPCC adviser** "It is really great that your daughter is aiming for college or university and we know that as parents you want to keep her safe. But if she is going to be successful in her studies, she will need to know how to look after herself independently. It can be difficult balancing your desire to protect her, against the need to help her prepare for adulthood. She will need to know how to shop, use public transport and cross roads safely. Better to help her develop these skills now while you are there to guide and support her, than find she is coping with this alone at university."

# Parents' tips on keeping your child safe

We asked parents for their top tips on ways to keep children safe when they are out and about. This is what they told us:



1

**As soon as children are able to understand,**

teach them their full name, address and telephone number. We practised them at bath time until we were sure they knew them.

2

**Never leave young children playing unsupervised**

in shops, parks or cars. The only time I make an exception is in the petrol station forecourt where they are safer in the car, but I insist they stay strapped in and I can see them at all times.

3

**Hold hands, use reins or a buggy.**

It only took my toddler a minute to wander off while I stopped to do the eldest one's laces. Now I use reins every time.

4

**Teach children about staying safe.**

We have taught our two never to go off with anyone, not even someone they know, without first asking us or the person looking after them. We started telling them this when they were only three.

5

**Teach older children safe ways of crossing roads.**

I didn't realise children under eight can't judge speed and distance until I was told. We cross roads now like we're in a TV ad. I get them to tell me what to do and we talk about the safest places to cross, and all the risks.

6

**Respect a child's 'no'.**

I don't want my sons to feel they have to do anything they don't like with an adult or older child. I don't insist that they kiss or hug relatives and I stop our tickle fights as soon as either one says 'no' or 'stop'.

7

**Listen to your children.**

It is really important to listen and believe what your child is trying to tell you. Our daughter was worried about a bully at a local club she attended. We were able to address this with the club very quickly. She is now much happier and we know she is safe.

**Remember the three Ws!**

Even with older children, make sure that they always tell you **who** they are going out with, **where** they are going and **when** they will be back. If possible, get a phone number where you can reach them.

**Don't over-protect your children.**

While it's important for children to play in a safe area, they do need to be challenged once they are old enough and take risks in order to develop.

## Further information

### Family Lives

A national charity providing help and support in all aspects of family life

[www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)  
0808 800 2222

### Parenting NI Helpline (Northern Ireland)

[www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org)  
0808 8010 722

### Direct Gov

Information and advice for parents on safety, childcare and schooling  
[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

"The problem with 'stranger danger' messages is children don't know who to trust. If they are ever in a difficult situation, I have told them to look for a police officer or a shop assistant or find an adult who is looking after a child to ask for help. And we have talked about getting lost and what to do. When we go somewhere new we agree where our meeting place will be in case we get separated."

**Clare, mum of Jamie, 11, Mary, nine and Kate, six**



## Keeping children safe when taking part in activities

There are so many activities to choose from after school and particularly during the school holidays. You may want to encourage your child to participate, but how do you know these activities are safe?

Most day care and activities such as child minders, crèches, playgroups, clubs and holiday play schemes that include children under eight need to be registered with appropriate authorities, which means they have to meet certain standards. Clubs and holiday schemes for children over eight do not require registration but you should expect the same standards from all organisations.

To find out what is available in your area, ask other parents for their recommendations. Direct.gov also has good advice on finding and choosing childcare, visit [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

Once you have found one, you will need to get a feel for the place. This means making a visit to the centre or club you are thinking of before you enrol your child. If the other children there look happy and are smiling, it is a good sign. Here are some questions you should ask:

- **Are the staff and volunteers suitable to work with children?**

All staff and volunteers should go through a proper recruitment process, which includes interviews, references and necessary legal checks such as with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). Are the staff friendly and welcoming?

- **Does the organisation have a child protection policy and code of conduct?**

All organisations should have a child protection policy and a written code of conduct, outlining good practice when working with children. They

should have a clear procedure for dealing with concerns about possible abuse, and be happy to show these to you when you ask. Ideally, there should be a named person or club welfare officer who will answer any queries you may have. Unacceptable behaviour such as bullying, shouting, racism and sexism should not be tolerated.

- **Does the organisation/activity have a health and safety policy?**

Find out if a trained first-aider is available at all times and find out what sort of policies and procedures they follow.

- **How does the organisation provide for intimate care needs?**

In the case of very young or some disabled children you should check what provision is made for toileting, feeding and administration of medicines.

- **What are the arrangements when children go on outings?**

You should be informed about arrangements for all outings – including the transport there and back, worker-to-child ratios and

emergency contact details. If the outings are a regular arrangement, then your consent should be obtained before the first outing and may not necessarily need to be obtained for subsequent trips. For one-off outings your consent should be obtained each time.

- **Does the organisation have an internet safety policy?**

If the organisation allows children to access the internet, find out what guidelines, filtering software, and supervision arrangements they have in place for safer surfing.

- **How can you, your child, or a child you know voice concerns?**

If you are concerned you must take action. Speak to other parents or to the leader in charge of the activity. You can contact the NSPCC at any stage for advice and support, on 0808 800 5000.



“When we saw an ad for a junior gymnastics class, Christy jumped at the chance. From the initial phone call to the office, I was impressed: the helpful assistant assured me that the staff had been CRB-checked, the instructor was fully qualified and insured and the class was GymMark\* registered. We were even invited to come and watch a display of the children’s work at the end of the session.”

**Donna, mum of Christy, seven.**

\* The British Gymnastics club accreditation scheme that recognises a quality club. See [www.british-gymnastics.org](http://www.british-gymnastics.org)

## What should you be wary of?

- **No parental presence** – parents should be encouraged to stay and watch their children, and cheer them on. Be wary of clubs that say you can't.
- **Inappropriate practices** – activities encouraging rough play, sexual innuendo and humiliating punishments are completely unacceptable.
- **Individuals who take charge and organise activities themselves**, without the knowledge of the organisation or independently of organisational guidelines.
- **Favouritism** – no child at a club should be singled out for extra-special praise or favouritism – every child should be praised for their individual merits.
- **Unhappy children** – if the children aren't enjoying it or frequently drop out, it's a sign that all is not well.
- **Lack of communication** – make sure that the staff involve you and keep you up-to-date with your child's progress.
- **Invitations for children to spend time alone with staff or volunteers** (or even to visit their homes).

**Remember:** A good club should always encourage parents to be part of their child's activities.



## Find out more

### NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU)

works with UK sports councils, governing bodies and other organisations to help keep children safe from harm during sporting activities. See their guidance for parents and carers. [thecpsu.org.uk](http://thecpsu.org.uk)  
[cpsu@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:cpsu@nspcc.org.uk)

### The Safe Network

Provides advice and guidance about keeping children safe during club or group activities [www.safenetwork.org.uk](http://www.safenetwork.org.uk)  
[enquiries@safenetwork.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@safenetwork.org.uk)

### Clubmark

National cross sports quality accreditation scheme for clubs with junior sections [www.clubmark.org.uk](http://www.clubmark.org.uk)

### NCVYS – Sound Systems

National accreditation scheme for safeguarding children and young people [http://ncvys.org.uk/Sound\\_Systems.html](http://ncvys.org.uk/Sound_Systems.html)

## Don't wait until you're certain

Keeping children safe is everybody's business. It can be difficult to know how to act and what to do, especially when another adult is involved.



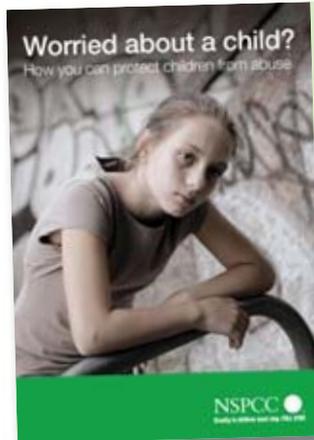
- If you see a distressed child that you think is being bullied, stop and ask why the child is upset. Get help from other adults passing by if you need to. If you are still concerned, get a good description of those involved and phone **the police**. Don't give up until you're sure the child is safe.

- If you see a child being ill-treated by an adult, offer to help. If you try to be kind and positive you will be doing the right thing. If your offer of help is refused but you are really worried about the child's safety, get a good description of the adult and ring the **police**.

- If you aren't able to help a family you know who may be in trouble or if you know of a child who may be in danger, please contact the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000.

Worried about a child?  
Don't wait until you're certain. Call the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000

# More advice from the NSPCC



## Worried about a child?

Provides practical advice on how to protect children from abuse, including the steps that can be taken by anyone worried about the safety of a child.

Download a copy from  
[www.nspcc.org.uk/worried](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/worried)

## Child Protection in Sport Unit

Provides advice to help you ask the right questions about important child protection measures that sports providers should have in place, wherever and whatever your child participates in.

[the cpsu.org.uk](http://the cpsu.org.uk)

## Does your child take part in activities in a group or club?

We can help you keep your child safe.

[www.safenetwork.org.uk](http://www.safenetwork.org.uk)

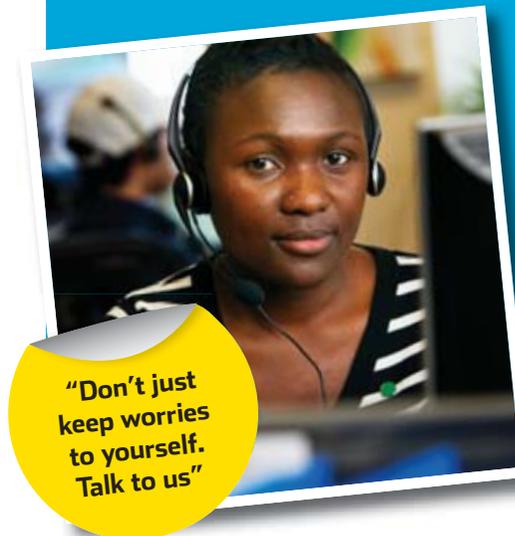
**safe** network  
Safe Activities For Everyone

## Worried about a child?

Don't wait until you're certain, contact the NSPCC. Trained helpline counsellors are ready to offer expert help, advice and support 24/7. It's free, and you don't have to say who you are.

Call 0808 800 5000,  
email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)  
or visit [nspcc.org.uk/helpline](http://nspcc.org.uk/helpline)

If you are hard of hearing,  
contact us via  
[www.nspcc.org.uk/helpline](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/helpline)



## Our parenting pack

If you've found this leaflet useful, you might like to try some of the other titles in our parenting pack. They include plenty of advice on practical, positive parenting, and cover subjects like managing stress, listening to children and keeping your child safe when they're home alone.

To request a pack, email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) or call **0808 800 5000**, mentioning the parenting pack or download copies from [www.nspcc.org.uk/parenting](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/parenting)





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[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**0808 800 5000 • [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)**

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