**Playing Out**

New information from policy studies institute has revealed that there has been a dramatic decrease in children’s independence over the past 40 years. The study shows that only 25% of primary aged children are allowed to travel home from school alone compared to 86% in 1971 and that just 10% of 7 year olds have the freedom to play out in their local neighbourhood compared to 50% 40 years ago.

I believe it is very important that we take steps to encourage parents to allow their children more freedom.

I have played out since I was age 6 and now at age 11 I can appreciate the importance of my time spent playing out. I have learnt negotiating skills by trying to get out of being IT. I have learnt how to communicate with different age groups and nationalities. In games like hide and seek we learn how to be strategic and develop problem solving skills. I have come to recognise the importance of values such as honesty, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion. Without my mum or dad there to back me up constantly I have been able to find my own way and make mistakes that I might not have done with them there all the time. When we play out without parents looking over our shoulders every 5 minutes we are, without even realising it, preparing ourselves for adult life. In our time spent without direct adult supervision we are free to organise ourselves into a hierarchy, this allows us to work whether we are a leader or a follower and again prepares us for later life and knowing what career path might be best for our personalities.

Playing out builds confidence, gives us the ability to handle situations, increases connections with friends & neighbours, develops our character, improves coping mechanisms and teaches us the importance of personal contribution. Overall I believe playing out increases resilience in children and in turn creates a much happier childhood.

So why the big dip in children’s freedom? According to campaign group ‘Play England’ the main things preventing parents letting children out to play are: Traffic, lack of neighbourliness and ‘stranger danger’. The statistics actually show that between 1995 & 2014 the number of road traffic accidents has actually decreased and the number of violent offences has fallen too!

So, is it down to the fact that awareness of the risk is actually much greater and therefore parents are wrapping children in cotton wool? Adventurer Bear Gryls says ‘I think with kids if you teach them that there is no risk in life you are doing them a disservice. If you want to empower kids, you teach them how to manage risk, and do risk but do risk safely’.

I think we need to work together to create awareness of the importance of playing out and try to convince parents of children who don’t give their children independence that it’s as important as school work to children’s development.