Adolescents usually want more freedom than parents are prepared to give.

Most teenagers think they are three years older than they really are, and many parents think their teenage children are three years younger than they really are. Getting the ‘freedom’ balance right is obviously quite tricky, though it often comes with experience.

You are probably familiar with the fact that the teenage brain is very much a work-in-progress. Parents of teenage children should carry a little card with the words “Teenager: Brain under Construction” printed on it to remind them that young people are poor assessors of risk.

Adolescents often act first, and think later. This means parents need to be very hands-on with their parenting in this potentially tricky stage.

It’s important that parents put processes in place that will help reduce risk and keep their young people in this age group safe. These include: expecting teenagers to maintain contact with you; setting time limits for being out; and rewarding responsible behaviour with greater freedom. There are three things parents need to know when their young people go out:

1. Where are you going?
2. Who are you going with?
3. When will you be home?

From my experience most parents ask the first two questions, but often forget to ask the third question – When will you be home? Get into the habit of asking this question each time your adolescent steps outside the front door to go out with their peers.

Here are five simple parenting ideas to build independence in your young person:

1. Never do for a teenager the things they can do for themselves
2. Monitor kids’ movements without being too restrictive
3. Reduce risks for teenagers through skilling up & scaffolding
4. Build expectations around remaining in contact and home times
5. Reward responsible behaviour with greater freedom