

# Free-range kids a challenge for anxious parents

The mother who let her son catch the New York subway alone says children need room to grow

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LENORE Skenazy jokes that the next battleground in parent-land may be the fight over whose children are more "free-range".

Which mums and dads are more prepared to let their young child out the front door to roam and play down the street?

"Maybe it'll become a race. My kid is more free-range than yours," says Skenazy, a New York journalist, columnist and author given the invidious title of "America's worst mom" a couple of years ago.

She secured the moniker for allowing her then nine-year-old son to ride the subway home from Bloomingdale's department store by himself. All hell broke loose when she wrote about the decision

about the benefits, rather than just the costs, of letting children take risks. Building self-reliance rather than child-proofing them.

"In this desire to keep kids safe, we tend to do too many things with them or, worse, for them," Skenazy says. "I think a parent is better off trying to prepare their kids for how to handle risky situations.

"I remember reading one parenting magazine that advises parents to take a spare pair of shoelaces if you are visiting someone's house with your toddler, so you can tie their cabinets shut. So the message was you must child-proof the world, even if it's clearly insulting to your hosts, rather than teaching your child not to open other people's cabinets."

"We've become assistants, bodyguards and camp counsellors. It's a big burden for parents, but I've been criticised for suggesting that parents don't have to throw a ball to their child, that their child can throw it against a wall, or go visit a friend to see if they want to