

PRESENTER AND ACTOR

GRIFF RHYS-JONES

ON HOW WE CAN KEEP OUR YOUNGSTERS SAFE AND SOUND

Who'd be a parent? Who'd be a child? My daughter has been embarrassed enough by my behaviour in the past, but I think she has recently learned to tolerate me with sort of a knowing weariness. Now she has announced to her poor father that she is intending to set off around the world with a friend who smokes.

When she told me, I opened my mouth and made soft popping noises. Apparently, that was all I was allowed to do. My little baby daughter is, to my amazement, 18 years old and, so it seems, her own woman. She has launched herself from the protective safety of school out into the big, bad world. Just like an estimated 450,000 other sproglings across Britain, she will take a gap year, and there is precious little I can do about it – except to fork out a significant sum of money and go a little more white-haired with worry.

How many of those innocents fall victim to assault? Proportionately few, I suspect. But every week, the paper seems to bring a story of murder in Thailand, death on a lonely outback road in Australia or serial killing in France. I'm not being xenophobic. Let's throw in abduction and murder

Mean streets: whether abroad or closer to home, the world seems increasingly hazardous. The Lucie Blackman Trust, which has Griff's backing, is promoting initiatives like SafetyText in the hope that fewer families will have to experience the pain of the Blackman family

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in Cambridge or Leeds. Somewhere, in bars across Britain, it would appear there are evil scumbag losers waiting to spike our children's drinks with drugs.

When undercover police posed as glasses collectors in Chelmsford, Essex, eight out of 200 glasses had traces of drugs. It's an increasingly hazardous world we live in. The notion that one's own daughter – vulnerable, abroad and alone – should become the target for a ruthless and determined predator is a sort of waking nightmare.

For Tim Blackman, the nightmare became reality. Tragically, his 21-year-old daughter Lucie was murdered while living in Japan. Her drink was drugged and she died alone and far from home. His family's heart-rending experience is reason enough for all of us to do what we can to heed his warnings. Bravely, Tim has taken steps to do what he can to help everybody else. He has founded the Lucie Blackman Trust, which aims to highlight how we can make the best use of modern technology to protect and support young people.

One way is to use SafetyText. It's a timed message that's easily used on an ordinary mobile phone. Text in details of where you are going or who you are with and that message will be delivered to a specified number a few hours later. Of course, if you're home and safe, then you can cancel the message.

I want my daughter to learn to use this system. I think it would be good if she set it as a matter of course. As Tim explains: "In itself, it is part of building up safety-consciousness."

The media sometimes seem rather

unhappy that many children have telephones. "Children as young as eight are given mobiles!" scream the headlines. I am ambivalent. I hate premature would-be sophistication, too. I hate the adult world being forced on children too young to make a choice for themselves. I know that ring tones disrupt lessons and I appreciate that the things should be strictly controlled. However, I bought my daughter a mobile phone at an early age in order to keep in touch with her, not so she could phone her bookie or fry her brain with microwaves while chatting to her mates.

It has been a successful experiment. As she gets older, she wants to go her own way. Now she has to move up a step. Safetytext won't work on its own. She has to want to use it. It allows her to be independent on her own terms, but safe on ours. I want it to become a habit for her. Various authorities feel the same way. The universities are enthusiastic supporters of this scheme and many of them have adopted it for Freshers' Week. Tim and his team have had difficulty printing up leaflets to cope with the demand.

The Lucie Blackman Trust is also developing drink-testing kits and is promoting the "In Case of Emergency phone number" idea, which urges people to enter a contact number on their phones under the name ICE. The police are in favour and it seems sensible to me as well. In fact, I'm going to stick it on my own phone straight after writing this.

With today's technology, it's possible to have radio-controlled e-pirbs that



Griff Rhys-Jones, 52, is a comedian, actor and presenter. His recent work includes the BBC series *Red Dwarf* and he can be seen on TV in *The Smith and Jones Sketch*

monitor the passage of ships across the oceans. There are also microphones, dogs, which tell us when they've gone for walkies on their own. I'm sure I'll snore entirely easily until I can watch my daughter in South America as a little red dot on a massive map on a television mounted on my bedroom wall. That, or I'll have to get a tiny device to discretely follow her, like a *Walter Matthau*.

The Trust is in its early days, anxious to woo scientists with its technological notions, so I have no doubt there will be developments to come. And I will be there to see those, too. I fancy that, in the end, it may be something of the technology that will be most useful.

If we all do what we can to support SafetyText and other systems as suggested, it may eventually be possible to do little more than display a badge: "I'm out with SafetyText. A little extreme? Perhaps. I don't want signs that read: "I'm in here" for thieves about ravenous robbers lurking behind the fence – they are peculiarly effective, aren't they? Never jump over them. I don't want my Brother to be watching my daughter, but I'd rather like Big Daddy if you don't mind.

For more information on the Lucie Blackman Trust, visit www.lucieblackmantrust.org. To register mobile phones for SafetyText, visit www.safetytext.com



Lucie Blackman Trust

ICE Advice | ICE Downloads

ABOUT In Case of Emergency - ICE
The ICE concept was the brainchild of Cambridge-based paramedic Bob Brothie, who works for the East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust. He discovered that most accident victims carry no next of kin details. He discovered that most accident victims carry no next of kin details. He discovered that most accident victims carry no next of kin details.

ICE was launched in early 2005 in conjunction with the Vodafone Life Savers awards, and was endorsed by the Daily Express backed Life Savers awards, and was endorsed by the Daily Express backed Life Savers awards, and was endorsed by the Daily Express backed Life Savers awards.

Bob, a father of two sons, has spent most of his life in Cambridge but now lives in Mildenhall. He joined the East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust as a paramedic in 1992 and spent three years working on the William Air Ambulance.

Team Leader at Cambridge ambulance
Reading, music, football and motor sports.

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safetytext.com

Wednesday 11th October

Instruction video on how to use

SafetyText is a delayed texting solution to personal safety.
Write a text in a NEW way, and YOU decide when your friend will receive it. When you are home safe, then you can cancel it.

It only costs 50p + your network charge, for peace of mind when you're out and about!

To send a SafetyText on your mobile phone now, do this:

Place your mouse pointer

MISSING

行方不明の英国人女性をさがしています

ルーシー・ブラックマン (英国人女性)
Lucie BLACKMAN (British Female)

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