Supporting someone to become independent means that they have to take some risks - both small and large. Keeping them safe may mean limiting their opportunities to learn and enjoy a satisfying life.

When a parent is cautious about supporting someone to take a risk they are sometimes labelled as being 'over-protective'.

When service providers are cautious they may say they are acting within their 'duty of care'.

Many parents are concerned about their family member taking risks. This is understandable. It is part of the role and responsibility of parenting to keep their family safe. In many cultures this is a very high priority and will be an important consideration in all their decision making about their family member - no matter what that person's age.

Also parents have had a life time of caring for their family member. There will have been times when risks may have been taken but the experience was negative, or when they took the advice of workers and something bad happened.

Many workers take on a caring role when supporting someone with a disability. They bring to their work values that have developed in their own culture and family. This may mean that they also want to be cautious in supporting someone to take risks. They are also aware of their duty of care that is a significant legal responsibility. However workers also have a responsibility to take on an education role - working with the person so that they become as independent as they possibly can and so reduce their reliance on others.

How to achieve the balance?

1. Get to understand what duty of care means for you - there is a lot of misunderstanding about this. Duty of care does not exist to create restrictions for people with a disability.

2. Work with the person to develop their skills so that they can make their own decisions and be able to communicate their choices. Education provides a person with information that makes them more able to make informed decisions.

3. Work as a team so that all issues are debated and joint decisions are made.