

Every parent's nightmare

It's every parent's worst nightmare. In a moment when your child is away from your direct supervision, a stranger approaches them. Your child is enticed with candy, a plea for help, or with a false message from home. The car door opens and shuts and they are gone.

Each year an average of 1,300,000 children under the age of 18 are reported missing. Of this staggering number many are the result of abduction by family members, children who get lost and teenage runaways. However an average of 58,000 kids are abducted by non-family members each year, and of those around 115 children are the victims of traditional kidnapping, resulting in ransoms, sexual abuse, trafficking, or murder. One in four girls and one in six boys under the age of 18 become victims of molestation.

Preparation

Does your child know what to do if approached by a stranger? Do you have a plan in place to mitigate the risk? Are you prepared to assist law enforcement if the unthinkable happens?

All young people are at risk of abduction, assault and abuse. The best way to prevent tragedy and protect your family is to prepare your children for the correct responses and reactions to unsafe situations. Plan for safety and be prepared for the worst.

Stranger Awareness

Does your child know what a stranger is? Ask him or her. While it's important to educate young children about strangers, it's also important to lower their anxiety levels. Children shouldn't be in fear of everyone they see. Use the following strategy:

- *Teach them that a stranger is anyone you don't know well.*
- *Look for teachable moments when you can point out strangers in public places. Explain that most people are good and that means that most strangers are good.*
- *For those strangers that "bother" your child, they need to develop "Safety Smarts" to keep them safe.*



RESOURCES

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children:
800-THE-LOST
www.missingkids.com

Polly Klaas Foundation:
<http://www.pollyklaas.org>

AmberWatch Foundation:
<http://www.amberwatchfoundation.org>

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PREVENTING ABDUCTION

keeping your children safe



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Safety Smarts for Children

Safety Smarts means knowing what to do in any unsafe situation. You should explain the difference between being “together” and being “on their own.” Being “together” means being close to a parent or guardian and under their direct supervision. Being “on their own” means anytime they are alone, even if just for a few minutes. Children should use different “Safety Smarts” when they are on their own. Teach and practice the following with your children:

- Encourage your children to interrupt adults whenever they see an unsafe situation.
- Talk to kids about whom they could go to for help in any situation, like a teacher, storekeeper, police officer or security guard. Explain to them that while these people may be strangers, you believe them to be “helpful strangers.”
- Teach your child to “Get Away and Check if it’s OK”:

Before talking to a stranger

Before taking things from a stranger

Before going anywhere with a stranger

- Make sure your child knows their personal information such as address and home telephone number. It’s also a good idea to teach your child the telephone number of a family member or trusted friend.

- Children should never give out personal information such as their name, address or phone number to someone they don’t know. However, sometimes it’s necessary to give personal information to people children don’t know. In these cases they should “check if it’s ok” before doing so.
- Encourage your child to yell and run for help if someone is acting in a scary way. By using their bodies and voices they may attract attention to a dangerous situation. Have children practice screaming “NO!” and “STOP NOW!” or “I NEED HELP!” while they are running away.
- Children should know how to call 9-1-1 in an emergency.
- Let your child know that they may use violence to protect themselves from danger. Tell them that it’s ok to kick, bite, scratch and struggle to avoid being hurt or taken. You may want to enroll your child in a self-defense class to give them the confidence and skills they need to protect themselves. Explain to your child that using violence is the last resort for escaping danger and not to be used just because they are mad at someone.



Prevention Tips:

- *Don’t put your child’s name on t-shirts, backpacks or other belongings when a dangerous predator can see them.*
- *Have a recent photo and all of your child’s up-to-date personal information, including fingerprints, stored in a place where you can easily find it.*
- Have a plan and role-play what your child should do if you get separated at a fair, park or public place.
- If your child is separated from you, explain to them that there is safety in numbers. Encourage them to stick to populated areas and to avoid places that are not well lit.
- Have a Safety Smart Password that only you and your child know. If someone the child doesn’t know must collect them, instruct the child to ask for the password.
- Role-play with your child. Come up with potential dangerous situations that let your child demonstrate their stranger safety smarts.



If Your Child is Missing

- If missing from the home, at once search all potential hiding places, such as closets, under beds, etc.
- Immediately contact your local law enforcement if you cannot find your child.
- If your child goes missing in a store, contact the store manager or security officer. Many stores have procedures in place to immediately lock down the store and send employees looking for him or her.
- When speaking with law enforcement, provide all information about your child, including name, date of birth, and physical details such as weight, height and any identifying characteristics such as braces, glasses, clothing worn, etc.
- Request that your child’s information be entered into the National Crime Information Center’s Missing Person File.
- Contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 800-THE-LOST.

**Protect your children.
Plan. Prepare.
Prevent.**