

Stranger Abduction Precautions

Fortunately, there are precautions to teach your children which will significantly reduce the risks of them becoming another statistic as a victim of stranger abduction. Teach your children these recommended precautions and prevention tips as another fact of life and realize that they must be taught over and over again – once is not enough. Explain that most adults will not hurt them and that adults do not need children to help them – they need other adults. The slogan is “NO, GO, TELL.” Say no, then go and tell someone. Role-play child lures with your children so they can see first-hand how easy it can be to be tricked and, more importantly, what they should do in those situations. An informed child is a safer child.

- Ø Teach your children about the facts of abduction early. If handled in a simple and matter-of-fact manner, they will not be unnecessarily frightened by the idea of abduction.
- Ø Define what a stranger is and who they are. It could be the best-dressed, cleanest cut individual or someone in scruffy clothes. Strangers who abduct children look like normal people – many are people that children would trust. Isn't that what we were told – you'll know a stranger when you see one?? No longer! Strangers who kidnap children are cunning and smart. They will have answers for everything your child tells them. Most children will tell you a stranger is someone they have never met or seen. While this is true we need to explain that a stranger is also somebody they don't know well; for instance, a person they see on the street corner every day (mailman, jogger) or someone in the hallway at school (teacher, older student). You should also teach your children that casual knowledge should not interfere with their judgment in their own world. For example, an employee from daddy's office they see at the playground – they may say hello but should realize that this adult is still a stranger.
- Ø Listen to your children – carefully. Encourage them to tell you if they suspect something is wrong and praise them when they do tell you. Believe them and don't brush off their suspicions by thinking that this four-year-old child could not possibly be telling me the truth. Children do not lie about what has happened to them or to their friends. Tell them that they will never be punished for telling. If you can't be there, teach them who else they could tell: policemen, teachers, school nurse, family doctor, trusted neighbor, or friend. Even their best friend's mother. Make sure your children know you will listen to them.
- Ø Teach your children their full name, area code and phone number, address, and city where they live. Teach them your names, as they know you only as mommy and daddy. Have your children do a project in which they write these things down and explain to them how important this information is – even if they just get lost.
- Ø Children must know how to use a telephone. Teach them how to call and talk to the operator, how to use a pay phone, and how to make a long distance call. As we stated in *Parental Abductions Precautions*, let your children make your long distance calls for you. This way they will become confident when they realize that the phone is a communication tool and a lifeline to you. You will have to explain that a pay phone needs money to work, so perhaps you could always have your children carry change to use only for emergencies, not to buy candy, etc.
- Ø Teach your children about vacant lots and isolated places such as ravines, creeks, and wooded areas. Even homes under construction or those deserted make for wonderful play areas. Go with your child and be familiar with their favorite hiding place, where the “gang” plays, and any other places they might frequent, even though you have told them not to play there. If your child is abducted or goes missing, all these places must be searched.

- Ø Teach your children the buddy system. Encourage them to play in pairs or groups. Children usually like to do this anyway and it could protect them. Potential abductors look for children who play alone or walk to and from school, etc. by themselves. It just makes their task that much easier.
- Ø Shopping malls, fairs, exhibitions, large stores, and parks are all places where abduction occurs. Your children should be kept in sight at all times or be at your side. DO NOT let your child use the washrooms alone. Go into the washroom with them and wait there. It does them no good for you to wait out in the hall or at some pre-arranged meeting place. Beaches are notorious for this. Remember, between the washroom and you can be miles of open space. Never leave your children unattended. It takes less than thirty seconds to break into a vehicle and that is all the time it would take to abduct a child.
- Ø When your children reach an age where they can play with limited supervision, establish or become familiar with the Block Parent Program in your area. Teach them what the sign looks like and that it means any house displaying such a sign is a "safe house" where they can go if they are in trouble or need help. Each house showing a Block Parent sign has been thoroughly screen by police.
- Ø If you are in a situation where your children have to be home alone for any period of time and they are of an age where they don't need constant supervision, teach them how to lock the doors and windows. Make sure all the doors and windows have good locks on them. Tell them that, under no circumstances, are they to open the door for anyone. They need not even answer the doorbell as whoever is there probably needs help from an adult. Let your children know you will have a key to get in. The same principle applies to the phone. Teach them not to answer the phone unless you are home. However, if they do, NEVER EVER say that they are home alone but rather that you are home and just cannot come to the phone right now.
- Ø Post all emergency numbers by the phone. These should include, police, fire, ambulance, your work number, the number of a trusted friend or relative. Tell your children if they suspect something is wrong to call you at once. Make sure that your phone number is on the phone itself as well as your address. In a panic situation, few children can recall this information. In fact, few adults can either. This is of benefit for babysitters too.
- Ø The code word: use this system with your children. It can be fun by using simple words; for instance, their favorite food, cartoon character, toy, etc. The procedure is simple:
 - Establish the code word.
 - Reinforce it every day, perhaps at the breakfast table.
 - Change the word once it has been used and NEVER use it again.
 - Reinforce that this word is never to be told to anyone else, EVER.
 - Explain that they are to ask everyone who approaches them: "What is the code word?" Explain that if the grown up can volunteer the correct word, that it is safe to go with them as you have sent them.