

## Stranger Danger

One of the greatest concerns of parents for their children is “stranger danger.” The secret to teaching children about safety concerns is to educate without scaring. Let your child know that most people are okay, but there are some who cannot be trusted. Let them know that if they learn the techniques for abduction prevention, they will be more likely to be able to protect themselves. It is okay to be afraid because their fear will remind them to watch out for strangers. Focus on prevention strategies rather than quoting details from new stories, which elaborate on the frightening experiences of the child victims.

### Children Questions and Answers

- **What is a stranger?** A person that you and your parents do not know.
- **How might a stranger try to fool you into getting into their car?** By telling you that your parents couldn't come and he/she was sent to give you a ride home.
- **How can you protect yourself?** By asking the person to give you the family's secret code word.
- **Is it safe to accept gifts from strangers?** No!
- **If a stranger stops his/her car near you and asks for directions, what should you do?** Stand at a good distance from the car, even if asked to come closer. Suggest the person ask an adult.
- **If you become separated from your parents at a store or mall, what should you do?** Tell someone who works in the store that you are lost. Do not wander. If you cannot find a store employee, you might go to another adult with children.
- **What should you do if someone grabs you and starts taking you out of the store?** Yell, “I don't know you!” clearly and repeatedly.
- **What should you do if a stranger grabs or hurts your friend?** Run for help from your parents, a teacher, a police officer or another safe looking adult. Try to write down the license number.
- **In the event of an emergency, how can you call the police/fire?** Dial 9-1-1
- **What is a secret family code word used for?** To let you know that it is safe for someone to pick you up.
- **If you come home to an empty house after school, what is the first thing you should do?** Lock all of the doors
- **Are all strangers harmful?** No. You can respond politely as long as you protect yourself. It is okay to be rude if you feel at danger.

### Parental Recommendations

- Families should provide children with a secret code word, which you will give to an adult who must pick up your child in an emergency. Without that word, children should be taught to never go with anyone, not even a family friend.

- **Teach children about answering the telephone.** Children should never tell someone on the phone that no one is home, rather than their parents can't come to the phone right now!
- **If your child gets separated from you in a public place,** they may wait for a few moments in the place they last saw you and call out for you. After a few moments, they should ask for assistance from a store employee, uniformed security personnel or a uniformed police officer. Always have them ask for a person of authority.
- **If a stranger asks your child for help,** the child should tell them to ask another adult. Children want to help, but they must understand they need to maintain a safe distance from strangers. Remember, a stranger is merely someone that your child does not know. Do not let them be fooled by a stranger playing on their emotions, such as helping the stranger look for their lost puppy. This is a ploy, which happens too often.
- Many children may have occasion to sell or distribute a variety of items "door-to-door" for their school, church or club. Children should be counseled on polite techniques of turning down offers to go inside someone's home or business. They should remain in visible site outside at all times.
- **Avoid buying clothing, which publicizes a child's name** to potentially dangerous strangers. Label clothing in inconspicuous places.
- **If a stranger comes to the door, children should not let him or her in.** They may answer through a window or a closed door. If the stranger "has a package," tell children to advise them to leave the package on the porch or to come back later.
- There may be an emergency when your child may need to ask for help from a stranger. **Instruct your child; if possible, to say repeatedly and loudly, "I don't know you!"** You can tell them that "safe" strangers may come to their assistance.
- **Avoid leaving your child unattended in a car.**
- **Teach children to get in the habit of locking house doors automatically** when they come home, particularly if they come home alone.
- **It is often advised that children walk the same path** to and from school so they may be located if necessary.
- **Children need to understand that abductors may pretend to need help,** and sometimes ask children to ride along them to find a "lost pet" or to give them directions. Advise children to stay clear from the vehicle! If children do not want to be rude, they may direct the stranger to another adult.
- **Be aware that on one hand, we teach children to be respectful of adults while on the other hand, we are teaching children to avoid strangers** and, if the situation dictates, to directly disobey an adult. Be understanding. With experience and your help, children will learn to differentiate between adults who should be obeyed and those who probably should not be obeyed. It is often the most obedient and respecting children who are preyed upon because they think it always wrong to disobey an adult.

- You might wish to try some “role playing” games with your children. You may consider doing this with neighbors and their children. Some discussion questions might include:

*Remember that it is important to review these subjects with your child on a regular basis to insure they remember the information provided.*