

Q&A on CHILD SAFETY

What are the most important things parents and guardians should know when talking to their children about this issue?

Don't forget your older children. Children 11-17 are equally at risk to victimization. At the same time you are giving your older children more freedom, make sure they understand the important safety rules as well.

When you speak to your children, do so in a calm, nonthreatening manner. Children do not need to be frightened to get the point across. Fear can actually work at crosspurposes to the safety message, because fear can be paralyzing to a child.

Speak openly about safety issues. Children will be less likely to come to you if the issue is enshrouded in secrecy. If they feel you are comfortable discussing the subject matter, they may be more forthcoming to you.

Do not confuse children with the concept of "strangers." Children do not have the same understanding of who a stranger is as an adult might. The "stranger-danger" message is not effective, as danger to children is much greater from someone you or they know than from a "stranger."

Practice what you talk about. You may think your children understand your message, but until they can incorporate it into their daily lives, it may not be clearly understood. Find opportunities to practice "what if" scenarios.

Teach your children it is more important to get out of a threatening situation than it is to be polite. They also need to know it is okay to tell you what happened, and they won't be a tattletale.

What are the most important things parents and guardians should tell their children about this issue?

Children should always **check first** with you or a trusted adult before they go anywhere, accept anything, or get into a car with anyone. This applies to older children as well.

Children should not go out alone and should always **take a friend** with them when they go places or play outside.

It's okay to say **no** if someone tries to touch them or treats them in a way that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused and to get out of the situation as quickly as possible.

Children need to know they can **tell** you or a trusted adult if they feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.

Children need to know there will always be someone to help them, and they have the right to be safe.

What is the biggest myth surrounding this issue?

The biggest myth is that the dangers to children come from strangers. In the majority of cases the perpetrator is someone the parents/guardians or child knows, and that person may be in a position of trust or responsibility to the family.

What advice would you offer parents and guardians who wanted to talk to their children about this issue?

Parents and guardians should choose opportunities or “teachable” moments to reinforce safety skills. If an incident occurs in your community, and your children ask you about it, speak frankly but with reassurance. Explain to your children that you want to discuss the safety rules with them, so they will know what to do if they are ever confronted with a difficult situation. Make sure you have “safety nets” in place, so your children know there is **always** someone who can help them.

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