

CHILD SAFETY

Would Your Child Know What to Do If:

He/she got lost at a shopping mall?

A nice-looking, friendly person offered her/him a ride home?

A friend dared him/her to drink some beer, smoke or take drugs?

A babysitter or neighbor wanted to play a secret game?

A great thing about kids is their natural trust in people, especially adults. It's sometimes hard for parents to teach children to balance this trust with caution. But kids today need to know common-sense rules that can help keep them safe – and build the self-confidence they need to handle emergencies.

Start With the Basics

Make sure your children know their full name, address (city and state), and phone number with area code. Be sure your kids know to call 911 in emergencies and how to use a public phone. Practice making emergency calls with a make-believe phone.

Tell them never to go anywhere with anyone for any reason at any time or to accept gifts from someone, unless they check first with the person who is in charge. If they can't check, the answer is NO.

Teach children if they are separated from you in a store, stay where they are. FREEZE your feet and YELL your mom's or dad's first and last name. They could ask a clerk to go for help, but stand still in that spot. If anyone tries to move or hurt your children, tell them to be sure to scream, kick, fight & yell, "You're not my dad (or mom)".

Set a good example with your own safety precautions – lock doors and windows and see who is there before opening the door. Take time to listen carefully to your children's fears and feelings about people or places that scare them or make them feel uneasy. Tell them to trust their instincts.

Please talk with your children about drugs. Be honest about the consequences and terrible effects the drug has on the body. Tell them that you do not approve of drug usage. Remind your children that drug use is illegal and can lead to high fines and jail time. Make sure that your children know that if they become involved with drugs you will be there to assist them in getting back to a drug free life.

At School or Play:

Encourage your children to walk and play with friends, not alone. Tell them to avoid places that could be dangerous – vacant buildings, alleys, playgrounds or parks with broken equipment and litter.

Teach children to settle arguments with words, not fists, and to walk away when others are arguing. Remind them that taunting and teasing can hurt friends and make enemies.

Make sure your children are taking the safest routes to and from school, stores, and friends' houses. Walk the routes together and point out places they could go for help.

If anyone stops near your children, teach them to take two giant steps back away from the car. Even if they know the person, they do not need to go close to the car. Tell them to look for details: color of car, license plate, what the person looks like.

Encourage kids to be alert in the neighborhood, and tell an adult (you, a teacher, a neighbor, a police officer) about anything they see that doesn't seem quite right.

Check out the school's policies on absent children. Are parents called when a child is absent?

Check out daycare and after-school programs. Look at certifications, staff qualifications, rules on parent permission for field trips, reputation in the community, parent participation, and policies on parent visits. Check babysitter references.

On the Web:

Inform your child that some people on the web are not what they seem to be. They are very good at using the Internet, and can find out your child's name and address.

Explore the Internet with your child. Be sure they ask permission from you before signing on alone and they know which sites are allowed.

Teach your child to let you know right away if he or she finds something scary on the Internet.

Your child should tell you right away and never respond to a message that doesn't seem OK.

Tell your child to never send a picture of himself or herself to anyone without your permission; and to never give out his or her name, address, phone number, password, school name, parent's name, or any other personal information.

He or she should never agree to meet face to face with someone, and always tell you or another trusted adult if someone online asks to meet.

At Home Alone:

Leave a phone number where you can be reached. Post it by the phone, along with instructions to call 911.

Have your child check in with you or a neighbor when he or she gets home. Agree on rules for having friends over and going to a friend's house when no adult is home.

CHILD SAFETY

Make sure your child knows how to use the window and door locks.

Tell your child not to let anyone into the home without your permission, and never to let a caller at the door or on the phone know there's no adult home. Kids can always say their parents are busy and take a message.

Work out an escape plan in case of fire or other emergencies. Rehearse with your children.

Protecting Your Child Against Sexual Abuse:

Let your child know that he or she can tell you anything, and that you'll be supportive.

Teach your child that he or she is in charge of his body, that no one – not even a teacher or a close relative – has the right to touch him or her in a way that feels uncomfortable. It does not matter if you know the person or not. Your child must say no, get away, and tell a trusted adult (Especially if your he or she is told to keep it a secret.)

Don't force kids to kiss or hug or sit on a grown-up's lap if they don't want to. This gives them control and teaches them that they have the right to refuse.

Always know where your child is and who he or she is with.

Tell your child to stay away from persons who hang around playgrounds, public restrooms, and schools.

Be alert for changes in your child's behavior that could signal sexual abuse:

- **Sudden secretiveness**
- **Withdrawal from activities**
- **Refusal to go to school**
- **Unexplained hostility toward a favorite babysitter or relative**
- **Increased anxiety**

Some physical signs of abuse include bedwetting, loss of appetite, venereal disease, nightmares, and complaints of pain or irritation around the genitals.