



About CHILD SAFETY

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OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention
Office of Justice Programs • U.S. Department of Justice

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 from age 11 to 17 are equally at risk of being victimized. 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, reassuring manner. Children do not need to be frightened to get the point across. Fear may actually work at cross-purposes to the safety message, because fear may be paralyzing to children.
- 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 often much greater from someone they or you know.
- Practice what you talk about. You may think your children understand your message, but until they are able to 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 should be taught just because someone tries to engage them in conversation doesn't mean they should talk to that person or forget their safety rules. 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 another trusted adult before going anywhere, accepting anything, or getting into a vehicle 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 to make them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. When this happens they need to get out of the situation as quickly as possible.
- Children need to know they may **tell you** or another trusted adult if they feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- Children need to know they have the right to be safe. And when needing help children should **keep asking** until they get the help they need.

What is the biggest myth surrounding this issue?

Danger from strangers is the biggest myth when discussing the issue of child safety. In the majority of cases the perpetrator is someone the parents/guardians or children know, and this person may be in a position of trust or responsibility to a child and family.

What advice would you offer parents and guardians who want to talk to their child 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 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 available to help them.

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