

KNOW THE RULES...

GENERAL TIPS FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS TO HELP KEEP THEIR CHILDREN SAFER

While many parents and guardians feel they are faced with new and unprecedented challenges when trying to keep their children safer in today's fast-paced and increasingly global society, the **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children®** offers these commonsense, general safety tips to help families put these challenges into perspective.

- 1. Make sure you know where each of your children is at all times.** Know your children's friends and be clear with your children about the places and homes they may visit. Make it a rule for your children to check-in with you when they arrive at or depart from a particular location and when there is a change in plans. You should also let them know when you're running late or if your plans have changed to show the rule is for safety purposes and not being used to "check up" on them.
- 2. Never leave children unattended in a vehicle, whether it is running or not.** Children should never be left unsupervised or allowed to spend time alone or with others in vehicles as the potential dangers to their safety outweigh any perceived convenience or "fun." Remind children to **never** hitchhike, approach a vehicle, or engage in a conversation with anyone within a vehicle they do not know and trust. Also, they should never go anywhere with anyone without first getting your permission.
- 3. Be involved in your children's activities.** As an active participant you'll have a better opportunity to observe how the adults in charge interact with your children. If you are concerned about anyone's behavior, take it up with the sponsoring organization.
- 4. Listen to your children.** Pay attention if they tell you they don't want to be with someone or go somewhere. This may be an indication of more than a personality conflict or lack of interest in the activity or event.
- 5. Notice when anyone shows one or all of your children a great deal of attention or begins giving them gifts. Take the time to talk to your children** about the person and find out why that person is acting in this way.
- 6. Teach your children they have the right to say NO** to any unwelcome, uncomfortable, or confusing touch or actions by others and get out of those situations as quickly as possible. If avoidance is not an option, children should be taught to kick, scream, and resist. When in such a situation, teach them to loudly yell, "This person is not my father/mother/guardian," and then immediately tell you if this happens. Reassure them you're there to help and it is okay to tell you anything.
- 7. Be sensitive to any changes in your children's behavior or attitude.** Encourage open communication and learn how to be an active listener. Look and listen to small cues and clues indicating something may be troubling your children, because children are not always comfortable disclosing disturbing events or feelings. This may be because they are concerned about your reaction to their problems. If your children do confide problems to you, strive to remain calm, reassuring, and nonjudgmental. Listen compassionately to their concern, and work **with them** to get the help they need to resolve the problem.
- 8. Be sure to screen babysitters and caregivers.** Many jurisdictions now have a public registry allowing parents and guardians to check out individuals for prior criminal records and sex offenses. Check references with other families who have used the caregiver or babysitter. Once you have chosen the caregiver, drop in unexpectedly to see how your children are doing. Ask your children how the experience with the caregiver was, and carefully listen to the responses.
- 9. Practice basic safety skills with your children.** Make an outing to a mall or park a "teachable" experience in which your children practice checking with you, using pay telephones, going to the restroom with a friend, and locating the adults who may be able to help if they need assistance. Remember, allowing your children to wear clothing or carry items in public on which their name is displayed may bring about unwelcome attention from inappropriate people looking for a way to start a conversation with your children.
- 10. Remember that there is no substitute for your attention and supervision.** Being available and taking time to really know and listen to your children helps build feelings of safety and security.

