Basic Rules Of Safety For Children

As soon as your children can articulate a sentence, they can begin the process of learning how to protect themselves against abduction and exploitation. Children should be taught:

- If you are in a public place — for instance, a store, shopping mall, carnival, or amusement park — and you get separated from your parents, don't wander around looking for them. Go to a checkout counter, the security office, or the lost and found and quickly tell the person in charge you have lost your mom and dad and need help finding them.
- You should not get into a car or go anywhere with any person unless your parents have told you it is OK.
- If someone follows you on foot or in a car, stay away from him or her. You don't need to go near a car to talk to the people inside.
- Normally, grown-ups and other older people who need help should not be asking children for help; they should be asking other adults.
- No one should ask you for directions or to look for a "lost puppy" or telling you your mother or father is in trouble and he or she will take you to them.
- Don't give any information over the telephone to someone you don't know.
- If someone tries to take you somewhere, quickly get away from them and yell or scream, "This person is trying to take me away" or "This person is not my father (or mother)."
- You should try to use the "buddy system" and never go places alone.
- Always ask your parents' permission to leave the yard or play area or to go into someone's home. Be home when you are supposed to.
- Never hitchhike or try to get a ride home with anyone unless your parents have told you it is OK to do so.
- No one should ask you to keep a special secret. If anyone does, tell a parent or teacher.
- If someone wants to take your picture, tell your parents or teacher.
- No one should touch you in the area of the body covered by the bathing suit, nor should you touch anyone else in those areas. Your body is special and private.
- You can be assertive, and you have the right to say NO to someone who tries to take you somewhere, touches you, or makes you feel uncomfortable in any way.

Missouri Law Regarding Missing Children

Missouri law designates the Missouri State Highway Patrol as the central repository for missing persons records and information. Any parent, guardian, or legal custodian may submit a missing child report to the Patrol on any child whose whereabouts is unknown, regardless of the circumstances, subsequent to the reporting of such to the appropriate law enforcement agency within the county in which the child became missing. Per Section 43.404 RSMo., the Highway Patrol or any other law enforcement agency in the state that receives a missing child report is required to place the report into the Missouri Uniform Law Enforcement System (MULES) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer networks.

If you have information about the location of a missing child, please call the Missouri State Highway Patrol Missing Persons Unit at toll-free number 1-800-877-3452.

Emergency Assistance

1-800-525-5555
or cellular *55

Road Conditions

1-888-275-6636

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Protect Missouri's Children

Child Protection

As a society, our efforts to prevent crimes against children have not kept pace with the increasing vulnerability of our youngest citizens. After hearing the tragic stories about abducted or exploited children, most Americans are surprised to learn many crimes against children can be prevented. This brochure is about child protection. The messages in this guide, however, may be different from other safety and prevention instructions you have read.

The most important key to child safety is effective communication with your child.

Remember: Children who are not listened to or who do not have their needs met in the home are more vulnerable to abduction or exploitation. The first step you should take is to establish an atmosphere in the home in which your child feels truly comfortable discussing sensitive matters and relating experiences in which someone may have approached the child in an inappropriate manner or in a way that made the child uncomfortable. The simple truth is that children are often too afraid or too confused to report their experiences and their fears. In some ways, you should treat your children as you would your adult friends — allow them to talk freely about their likes and dislikes, their friends, their true feelings.

Unfortunately, the rising awareness of crimes against children has left many families with a real sense of fear. You and your child need to be careful, but you do not need to be afraid. Talk to your child in a calm and reasonable manner, being careful not to discuss the frightening details of what might happen to a child who does not follow the safety guidelines.

The Exploiter Or Abductor Is Not Always A "Stranger"!

"Stay away from strangers" is a popular warning to children to prevent abduction or exploitation. Unfortunately, many children are abducted or exploited by people who have some type of familiarity with the children, but who may or may not be known to the parents.

The term **"stranger"** suggests a concept children do not understand and is one that ignores what we do know about the people who commit crimes against children. It misleads children into believing they should be aware only of individuals who have an unusual or slovenly appearance. Instead, it is more appropriate to teach children to be aware of certain kinds of situations or actions rather than certain kinds of individuals.

Children can be raised to be polite and friendly, but suspicious of any adult asking for assistance. They should also know it is OK to say **NO** — even to an adult.

Situations and actions to watch for:

- Children should not be asked to keep special secrets from their parents.
- Children should not be asked to touch anyone in the bathing suit areas of their body or allow anyone to touch them in those areas.
- Often, exploiters or abductors initiate a seemingly innocent contact with the victim. They may try to get to know the children and befriend them. They use subtle approaches of which both parents and children should be aware.
- Children should stay away from individuals in cars or vans.

Remember: A clear, calm, and reasonable message about situations and actions to look out for is easier for a child to understand than a profile or image of a "stranger".

Child Protection Is The Responsibility Of Everyone!

Because children cannot look out for themselves, it is our responsibility to look out for them. Every home and school should establish a program that effectively teaches children about safety and protection measures. As a parent, you should take an active interest in your children, and listen to them. Teach your children they can be assertive in order to protect themselves against abduction and exploitation. Most importantly, make your home a place of trust and support that fulfills your child's needs — so he or she won't seek love and support from someone else.

Ways To Prevent Child Abduction And Exploitation:

- Know where your children are at all times. Be familiar with their friends and daily activities.
- Be sensitive to changes in your children's behavior. Changes are signals that you should sit down and talk to your children about what caused the changes.
- Be alert to a teenager or adult who is paying an unusual amount of attention to your children or giving them inappropriate or expensive gifts.
- Teach your children to trust their own feelings, and assure them they have the right to say NO to what they sense is wrong.
- Listen carefully to your children's fears and be supportive in your discussions with them.
- Teach your children that no one should approach them or touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. If someone does, children should tell their parents immediately.
- Be careful about baby sitters and any other individuals who have custody of your children.

- Don't leave your child alone in a public place, even for a moment.

Detecting Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation should not be confused with physical contacts that are true expressions of affections. A warm and healthy relationship can exist if adults respect the child and place reasonable limits on their physical interaction.

Child molesting is often a repeat crime. Many kids are victimized a number of times. The reality of sexual exploitation is that the child is often very confused, uncomfortable, and unwilling to talk about the experience to parents, teachers, or anyone else. But, they will talk if you have already established an atmosphere of trust and support in your home, where your child will feel free to talk without fear of accusation, blame, or guilt.

Parents should be alert to these indicators of sexual abuse:

- Changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying.
- Bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances.
- Acting out inappropriate sexual activity or showing an unusual interest in sexual matters.
- A sudden acting out of feelings, or aggressive or rebellious behavior.
- Regression to infantile behavior.
- A fear of certain places, people, or activities (especially being alone with certain people). Children should not be forced to give affection to an adult or teenager if they do not want to. A desire to avoid this may indicate a problem.
- Pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in the private areas.