

## STRANGER DANGER IS RARE, BUT ALL TOO REAL TALKING ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

In light of the recent child abduction attempt and with the school year coming to an end, safety concerns have never been more on the minds of parents. The fact that stranger abductions are rare in Canada is of little comfort to parents and the community. Parents must remain aware that such dangers are a constant reality.

Safety education helps build a child's confidence and critical thinking skills and prepares them for dangerous situations that they may encounter when home alone, surfing the Net, traveling to-and-from school or getting lost in public places. Adults need to empower children with age-appropriate information without inciting panic or fear. In times of crisis, it is important to re-establish a child's sense of security. The Missing Children's Network recommends that parents take this time to have open and honest discussions with their child and review the following safety strategies:

- **Ensure your child knows his complete name, address and telephone number.**

Should your child get lost or need to reach you in an emergency, he will need this personal information in order to obtain help.

- **Your child should always ask for permission before going anywhere.**

You must always know where your child is, as well as keep him informed of your whereabouts. Establish an information/communication centre in the house where every member of the family can leave messages.

- **There is safety in numbers.**

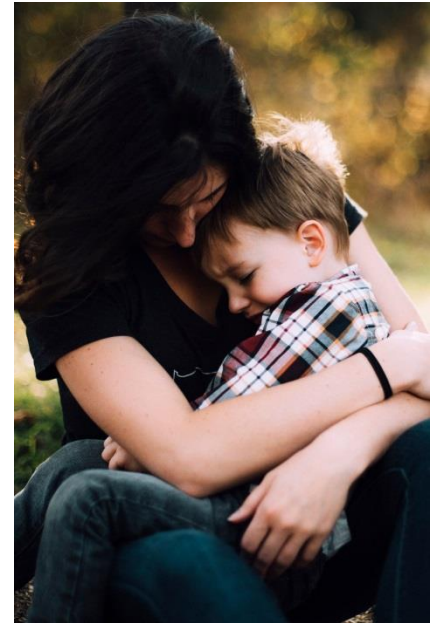
A child that is accompanied by a friend is less likely to be accosted by an individual with questionable intentions. Check out your child's friends and get to know their parents and other adults who spend time with your child.

- **Keeping a safe distance.**

Make sure your child understands that he does not have to engage in conversations with adults that approach him and to always keep a safe distance of at least three giant steps between himself and someone he doesn't know or who makes him feel uncomfortable. If someone grabs the child or tries to force him into a vehicle, tell your child to scream, **"This is not my father/mother! I need help!"**

- **Where to go for help if needed.**

Teach your child to always stay on the designated route when walking to and from school and identify safe havens along the route where he can seek refuge if he needs help: (Block parent, offices, fast food outlets, telephones where he can call 911).



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- **Use a secret family password to be used in an emergency situation (the person previously chosen by you should say the password to your child).**  
Plan alternative arrangements in case any unexpected situations arise and choose a password that is known only to you and your child. Your child must always ask for this password before leaving with someone who claims to have been sent in your place.
- **Labelling your child's personal belongings.**  
Avoid identifying items with your child's name clearly visible on them (lunch box, t-shirt, school bag, etc.) A child will respond more readily to a stranger if he is addressed by name.
- **Play "What if" scenarios with your children.**  
This technique is a valuable, educational tool because it fosters your child's ability to develop problem-solving skills that will enable him to adopt sound safety habits for life. Your child's autonomy and self-confidence will be enhanced and he will be able to make safe decisions when there is no adult present to guide him. Following are suggestions of scenarios to discuss with your child:
  - You are walking back from school and someone in a car stops to ask you for directions. What do you do?
  - It is raining and you are waiting for your school bus. The mother of a student in your class offers to drive you home. What do you do?
  - You are walking back from school and a neighbour invites you to his home in order to see his new puppy. What do you do?
  - You are at the mall and an elderly person asks for your help to choose a gift for her grandson. What do you do?
  - Your best friend asks you if you would accompany her as she wants to meet with a very cool friend she met on-line. What do you do?