

## Safety for Children - Family Rules

Establishing a system of "family rules" about personal safety is a good way to teach children the difference between safe and unsafe situations. Many families already have rules about bedtime, TV watching, chores, and the like. By adopting rules about personal safety, parents can teach good habits through reinforcement and repetition without generating excessive fear. The following suggestions for personal safety rules can be incorporated into a family routine.

### Inside Rules

- Children should know their complete home address, telephone number including area code, and parents' first and last names.
- If children are old enough to answer the telephone, they should be taught how to dial 911. Practice with the receiver button taped down.
- Children should be taught not to reveal any personal information about themselves or their family (their name, address, school) over the phone or to a stranger without a parent's permission.
- If children are home alone and answer the telephone, teach them to say that the parent cannot come to the phone right now and take a message, or ask the person to call again later.
- Have a "code" worked out with your children if you don't want them to answer any telephone calls but yours when they are home alone.
- Teach your children not to open the door until they know the identity of the person knocking. Then teach them to whom they are allowed to open the door to. Just because they know the person at the door does not mean they should open the door to them.
- Children should be taught how to lock and unlock the doors in the home.

### Outside Rules

- Establish a system of accountability. Learn the full names, addresses, and telephone numbers of your children's friends and parents. Verify the information with the parents of your child's friend. Learn the "rules" of the friends' houses. Who will be there when your child is there? The parents? Other children? Other neighbors? Will the children be alone?
- Know your children's routes to and from school, the playground, best friends' houses. Insist that the children stick to that route, NO SHORTCUTS! If you have to look for the children, you will know where to begin.
- Children need to be taught never to go anywhere with anyone, on foot or in a vehicle, without parent permission. This includes getting permission a second time if plans change and calling home for permission to go to a different friend's houses or play location.
- Teach children not to play in isolated areas of parks and playgrounds. The "buddy" system should be used to enter public restrooms.

- Teach your children what to do if they are walking to school or to a friend's house and they are being bothered or followed. Walk these common routes with your children and point out safe locations. A safe location can be a school, library, police station, store, or neighbor's house, anywhere that they can find a responsible adult or lots of people.
- Knocking on the door of a stranger is a last resort. If the child has no other choice because someone is bothering or following them, teach them to select a house with lights on at night or a house with children's toys visible. Teach the child to ask the person who answers the door to phone the police because they are being followed or bothered BUT teach them NOT to go inside a stranger's house.
- If there is no safe place for your child to receive help, teach your child to run away as fast as possible, screaming and yelling for help to attract as much attention as possible.
- Teach your child not to approach a car that stops and asks for help or directions. Most responsible adults would not ask a small child for directions anyway. If the car follows them or anyone gets out of the car and approaches them, teach them to run to a safe place screaming and yelling as fast as they can.

### **Bad Guy Rules**

- Teach children that bad guys might act nice and even offer gifts of toys or money. Make sure that they know NOT to accept gifts from strangers.
- Teach children that bad guys lie and that they should not believe them. Especially if the stranger tells them things like, "Your mom told me to pick you up after school," or "Can you help me find my lost puppy?"
- Bad guys even use threats like, "I'll hurt your mother if you don't come with me right now."
- Teach children that bad guys are people who ask them to violate family rules, including someone telling your child that they don't need permission to get a ride home, or that it is okay to come into a house without mom's permission, or, "Let's keep this a secret."