

Beckley Police Dept.

Discussing Stranger Danger with your children

Being Aware of and Available to Your Child

In any discussion of potential dangers your child may face, it's important to consider your own child's personality and temperament. Some children are naturally cautious in new situations. Others may respond more readily to friendly overtures and promises, and therefore need more guidance. Some parents may be reluctant to point out potential dangers, but keeping children uninformed is not an option. The effects of the media are powerful, and children of all ages watch television, hear news reports, and listen to adult conversations.

Your child needs to know that his parents, caregivers, teachers, Police Officers or other trusted adults are there to help if he has doubts, questions, or concerns about his safety.

Talk openly about strangers. Don't assume that your young child actually knows what the word "stranger" means. Be sure she is aware that a stranger is anyone she doesn't know. In a calm but firm manner, instruct her to never go anywhere, get in a car, answer questions, or accept anything from strangers - even if the person seems friendly. Stress the fact that strangers shouldn't be asking children for help or giving them things. Remind her that it's sometimes okay, however, to ask strangers for help. Children should know that certain people, although strangers, can be sources of help – a police officer, a mall security person, a store salesperson, or a mother with children.

Help your child identify a safety net of trusted adults and places, such as stores, schools, libraries, churches, synagogues, and homes of neighbors. Discuss safe routes to use on the way to and from school and other destinations, as well as places to avoid, such as deserted areas and parking lots.

Discuss what your child should do if he is separated from you, his caregiver, or teacher in a public place. Make sure he

knows he should go to an employee or security guard and not leave the site.

Encourage your child to trust her intuition and to take action when she senses she is in danger. Tell her not to worry about being polite, but to make a lot of noise, run away, scream, shout, kick, or punch. Teach the NO-GO-TELL system. Your child should: 1) Say **NO** if someone tries to touch her or makes her feel scared or uncomfortable, 2) **GO** quickly away from the situation, and 3) **TELL** a trusted adult.

When your child is old enough to go out alone, demand that he tells you the three Ws: *who* I'm going with, *where* I'll be, and *when* I'll return home. Make sure your child informs you anytime his plans change.

Make safety part of your routine everyday life. Alert your child to ploys that manipulative people may use to ingratiate themselves. Role-play some scenarios on a trip to a park or mall or other public place. For example, you might ask, "Suppose a person in a car asks you for directions? What if someone you don't know comes to pick you up at school or at a playground? What if they say I sent them? What if they ask for your help in finding a lost pet? Or ask if you want to do something that sounds fun?" Practice these and other scenarios on a regular basis to reinforce safety concepts.

Establish home and phone safety rules. When your child is old enough to stay home alone, she should keep the door locked and never answer questions over the phone or at the door.

Be aware of your child's Internet activities. Predators use online chat rooms and other Internet resources to arrange face-to-face meetings with children. Many Internet service providers provide parent-control options to block certain material from coming in to your child's computer. Special filtering software is also an option for blocking objectionable material. Use these tools, and stay involved in your child's activities.