

Reduce Your Child's Risk of Abduction

Although it can be very difficult to detect that a stranger abduction is occurring, or prevent a stranger abduction from happening, there are ways to become more aware of risks and act to intervene that can help protect your child and other children in your community from potential harm.

Pay Attention:

- To any new individuals you have never seen before hanging around places where children play (e.g. parks, playgrounds, schools, etc.), but not accompanying or supervising any one particular child.
- If you notice a young child on their own, get involved and call the police or accompany them to safety. See if their parents are nearby or call police or a child welfare agency to assist.
- If you notice an adult is trying to take a child away from a public place or children's area, if you suspect something isn't quite right, get involved. By simply drawing attention to the situation, it may be enough to stop a child abduction in progress.
- Pay attention to any news and/or alerts of recent child abduction attempts in your area.
- Most police agencies provide community notifications whenever a known sex offender is believed to be living or working in a community. Learn how this information is communicated, and be aware of what possible things you can do.
- Be aware of any individual paying an unusual amount of attention to your child or children in your community.
- If your child or a child you know tells you about someone they met online that made them feel uncomfortable, report the information to police or Canada's tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of Children – Cybertip.ca. While your child made the right decision in telling you, the next child approached online by the same individual may not feel like they can tell a safe adult and may be victimized as a result.
- Pay attention to children or youth who seem to be in distress, and seek help when necessary.

If you have concerns about an individual as outlined above, contact the police immediately so they can investigate. Provide a complete description of the individual and any vehicle they are using, including the licence plate number of the vehicle.

Teach Your Child How to Stay Safe

"Don't talk to strangers" is a strategy that has been traditionally used in personal safety education directed at children, but we have learned over the years that this type of safety strategy is not only outdated but ineffective in reducing a child's risk of abduction and victimization. The reality is that many child abductions are committed by people who are known to the child, and are therefore, not considered "a stranger," in the traditional sense, to a child.

Individuals seeking to abduct a child often do not fit the stereotype of "a stranger" in both a child's mind and even what we as adults define as "a stranger" — these individuals often present as "friendly" and act "nicely" towards the child in order to gain their acceptance and increase the likelihood that the child will go with them willingly. Rather than safety education focusing on the concept of "stranger danger," it is far more effective to teach children not to go **anywhere** with **anyone** without first getting permission from their parents. This strategy reinforces to children that the duty of supervision lies with parents as opposed to leaving it up to children to assess the motives of individuals.

What Children Need to Know

For Children Ages 4 to 6 Years:

- Teach your child that they must always have parental permission before going anywhere with anyone.
- Teach your child to always have a buddy with them when they are going places.
- Teach your child active resistance skills — this means shouting, kicking, biting or screaming if anyone (other than you) physically tries to take them somewhere. Use the slogan “If asked to go and your parents don’t know, SHOUT NO!”
- Teach your child what to do if they’re lost. In most cases, children should immediately sit down, stay in one place and call out for their parent.
- Teach your child to never leave with someone other than who they came with if lost in a shopping mall, amusement park or other public place/event.
- Please visit the Lost section for more information.

*Teach children they must have parental permission before going **anywhere with anyone**.*

For Children Ages 7 to 8 Years

- Reinforce all of the above safety tips from the “For Children Ages 4 to 6 Years” category. For example, children 7 to 9 years of age still need to be reminded that they must have parental permission before going anywhere with anyone, and that they should have a buddy with them when going places.
- Teach your child to trust their instincts. Explain to your child that their instincts are the feelings inside them that warn them of danger and the need to be aware of their surroundings.
- Teach your child that if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable they must immediately come talk to you.
- As children get older, they need to practice assertive behaviour. Children also need to know how and when to tell a safe adult if someone has broken their boundaries.”
- For more information on teaching your child the difference between Keep and Speak Secrets, see www.teatreetells.ca
- Keep a very close eye on your child while the two of you are out in public. In busy places, like amusement parks and shopping centres it is easy to lose sight of your child. Be sure to discuss a safety plan with your child for what they should do if they become separated from you.
- Practice scenarios with your child. Ask them what they would do if...
 - Someone approaches them on the street
 - Someone asks them to help find their kitten or puppy
 - Someone says that their mother sent them to pick them up
 - Someone tries to pull them into a car
 - They find themselves alone and are considering walking home alone

For Children Ages 9 to 11 Years

- All previous safety strategies mentioned above in the "For Children Ages 4 to 6 Years," and "For Children Ages 7 to 9" should be reinforced with this age group.
- If your child is going out with their friends (e.g. to the mall or to the movies), make sure your child's and their friend's transportation to and from the location is organized. Also, make sure that you are available while your child is out, in case they need to call you. Discuss with your child what they should do if they become separated from their friends while they are out.
- At this age, children should also be taught about how to stay safe when they are at home alone. Home alone safety strategies you can teach your child include: keeping the doors of the house locked when home alone; not opening the door or letting anyone in the house when home alone; not letting anyone know that you will be home alone; making sure all emergency and contact numbers are placed by the telephone; and not to hesitate to phone parents if needed.
- Talk openly with your child about safety and begin to talk about different types of lures adults may use to gain the trust of children. Frequently go through possible scenarios with your child involving different types of lures an adult might use to gain the trust of a child (including offering gifts, asking for help, saying there is an emergency, claiming to be an authority figure, using flattery, etc.) to help your child understand how to respond to these types of situations.
- If your child is going to a friend's house, have them call or text you when they have arrived at the house, or have their friend's parents call you when your child has arrived. When your child is returning home from their friend's house, get them to let you know when they're on their way from the house. Know the approximate distance and time it takes to get from one house to the other.

Teach your child that if they are physically grabbed, to actively resist (meaning screaming, hitting, biting, kicking) and try to attract people's attention to what is going on.

For Children Ages 12 to 13 Years

- As children are entering their teen years, they should still be reminded of the safety strategies mentioned above in the Children Ages 4-6, 7-9, and 9-11 sections. For example, teens still need to get parental permission before going anywhere with anyone; it's still important for them to bring a buddy along when going places; they need to continue to listen to and trust their instincts; and they need to continue to practice assertive behaviour.
- Teach your child to anticipate potentially dangerous situations — use "what if" scenarios to provide your child with opportunities to practice responding safely to these situations (e.g. "What if someone came up to you, said you were pretty, claimed to be a modeling agent and wanted you to come with them?").
- Teach your child the difference between a healthy relationship and an unhealthy relationship.
- If your child wants to meet an online friend in person, arrange to speak with the parent of the online friend. Together, you and the other parent can make plans for the children to meet with both of you present.

For Children Ages 14 Years and Older

- Continue to teach your child assertiveness skills. Use “what if” scenarios to help them anticipate possible situations (e.g. “What if you met someone online that wanted to meet you in person?”). Find natural opportunities to reinforce assertiveness skills and safety strategies, and discuss your child’s increased independence and how they might reduce their risk of being harmed.
- Continue to teach your child the importance of using the Buddy System when they go out for the evening with friends. Emphasizing the importance of sticking together with friends — whenever your child is going out somewhere, such as a party, remind them of the importance of getting friends to agree beforehand not to leave any friend behind when they leave. Explain to your child that part of being a good friend is looking out for each other and not leaving a friend behind, as it may cause them to be more vulnerable to victimization.
- When your adolescent goes out for the evening, they need to have a transportation plan in place to ensure that they will get home safely. By ensuring that your child and their friends have appropriate transportation to and from a place, that no one is left on their own to get home, and that nobody walks home alone, everyone is much safer.
- Ask your teen to text you when they arrive at their destination, change plans, or decide to stay over at a friend’s house.
- Tell your adolescent to call you if they need help. At some point of time, your child may find themselves in a difficult and/or bad situation that they don’t know how to get out of. Tell your child to phone you if they find themselves in such a situation, and you will come and get them immediately. Reassure your child that they will not get into trouble for calling you — tell them that you will deal with things the next day. Keep in mind that you need to mean it! Letting your child know that they can phone you, acts as a very important safety net, especially if your child is in a compromising or potentially dangerous situation.
- Talk to your adolescent about the difference between healthy relationships and controlling relationships. If an adolescent’s first serious dating relationship is controlling, it can negatively impact their development as well as create risks to their safety.

Make Safety a Habit!

During times of crisis we are often reminded about the importance of teaching children about personal safety. As adults, we often shy away from teaching children about sexual abuse and abduction, feeling we will frighten them. Safety education helps build a child’s confidence and critical thinking skills, and prepares them for dangerous situations that they may encounter.