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Children's Safety: Abductions

Thinking about your child being abducted is a scary thought, but it happens – about 2,100 missing child reports are filed each day.

However, there are steps that you can take to lessen the chance that your child becomes a statistic.

The Reality

Many times, what we see on television is how we perceive the world to be. However, that is usually not the case with child abductions. In general, no shadowy stranger emerges from the bushes and grabs a child alone on a playground, who in turn flails, kicks and screams. In fact, for the most part, children who are reported missing end up being fine, and were only “missing” due to a misunderstanding about where they were going to be. Other facts about abductions:

- The majority of kidnapped children are taken by a family member or acquaintance; only 25% are taken by strangers.
- Almost all children kidnapped by strangers are taken by

men, and about two-thirds of stranger abductions involve female children.

- Most abducted children are in their teens.
- Children are rarely taken from school grounds.

Be Prepared

There are many simple things you can do to ensure you have the most up-to-date information about your child, should the worst happen:

- Make sure any custody documents are in order.
- Have ID-like photos taken of your child every 6 months.
- Have your child fingerprinted. Many police departments sponsor fingerprinting programs, so check with your local branch.
- Keep your child's medical and dental records current.

Preventing Abductions

- Make online safety a priority – the Internet is a great tool for communication and research, but it's also the perfect place for predators to stalk children. Be aware of your children's activities online, and remind them to never give out personal information. You should also avoid posting photos or identifying material of your children online.

- Set boundaries about the places your children go; supervise them in places such as malls, movie theaters, parks or public bathrooms.
- Never let your child go fundraising door-to-door alone, even in your own neighborhood.
- Choose caregivers (babysitters, daycare providers, etc.) carefully; check their references.
- If you've arranged to have your children picked up from school by someone other than yourself or their other parent, inform the school about who this person is and what he/she looks like – and remember to let your children know, too! Ask the school to require the person picking up your children to show identification upon arrival.
- Never leave your child alone in a car or stroller – even if for a minute. That is all it takes for someone to grab your child.



- Avoid dressing your children with clothing that has their names on it – this includes items they may carry, such as backpacks or lunchboxes. Children tend to trust adults that know their names.

Talking to Your Child

It is a lot more effective to teach your children to be proactive and aware, rather than scaring them into being safe. Explain to them the basics on how to avoid and escape potentially dangerous situations.

Teach them to...

- Never accept candy or gifts from somebody they don't know.
- Never go anywhere with a stranger, even if it sounds fun. Teach your children that lines such as "Do you want to see my kittens in the car?", "Can you give me directions?", and "Can you help me lift this out of my trunk?" are things that adults should never ask a child. Remind them that if an adult needs help with something, they should ask another adult.
- Run away and make as much noise as possible if someone follows them or tries to force them into a vehicle.
- Say NO to anyone who tries to make them do something that makes them uncomfortable.
- Always tell you or another trusted adult if a stranger asks personal questions, exposes himself, or otherwise makes them feel uneasy, even if they aren't sure why. Reassure your children that it is okay to tell even if another adult has told them to keep a secret or threatened them in some way.
- Always ask permission from you or your spouse to leave the house, yard, or play area to go anywhere else, including a friend's house.

Other Important Tips

- Ensure that younger children know their names, address, phone number (including area code), and who to call in case of an emergency. Discuss what steps to take if they get lost in a public place or store, and remind them to never go looking for you on their own.
- Point out the homes of friends and people around the neighborhood that they can go to in an emergency.
- Be sure your children know in whose car they can ride in and in whose they cannot. Teach them to move away from any strange car that pulls up alongside them when they are walking, even if the person looks lost or confused.
- Develop code words for caregivers other than Mom or Dad, and remind children to never divulge those code words to anyone else.
- Make sure that your children understand the concept of a "stranger". Many children, especially younger ones, picture someone scary, mean and unpleasant-

looking. It might be wise to instead refer to a "stranger" as "somebody you don't know". Inform them that strangers come in all shapes, sizes, ages, and looks, and that they can be either male or female.

- If your children are old enough to stay home alone, instruct them to keep the door locked and to never tell anyone who knocks or calls that you are not home. If it is more feasible, tell them to not answer the door or phone at all.

If an Abduction Occurs

The first few hours are the most critical in missing child cases. Most children are found within 24 hours of their reported disappearance.

- Contact law enforcement immediately. Even if you suspect your child is possibly at a friend's house, it is vital to get the police involved just in case you are mistaken. It is much better to be safe than sorry.
- Make sure to have the most current picture of your child on hand for the police.
- Provide a description of what your child was wearing when he/she was last seen.
- Try to stay calm. You will be able to remember more details if you remain logical and rational.

Source: www.kidshealth.org

If you have information about a missing child, please contact the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children** at (800) 843-5678. You can also call **America's Most Wanted** at (800) CRIME-TV or contact any law enforcement agency.

Did You Know...?

For more information on child safety, visit America's Most Wanted at www.amw.com/missing-children/resources.cfm. You can also order a free Child Safety Kit from the Polly Klaas Foundation at http://pollyklaasaction.org/campaign/enewsletter_child_safety_kit.