

Abduction prevention guidelines

What parents need to know (and how to say it to your child)

Teaching these skills can be empowering for both you and your child. Practicing these coping strategies doesn't usually scare a child, unless **you** convey fear. So just try to be very matter-of-fact.

- Train your children to **check first** before accepting anything from other adults, before helping someone older, or before going anywhere with anyone. If the clerk in the store offers a piece of candy, even if you're right there, a child should always respond, "I have to ask first."
- Help your child say "**No!**" to adults. Children who are polite and compliant are at risk. Children are safer when they can recognize adults breaking the adult rules (like offering treats or asking for help), and can say "No!" and come tell you.
- Encourage children to **tell you** (or another trusted adult) if someone has made them afraid or uncomfortable. Ask: "Who could you tell if you couldn't tell me?" Tell them: "Keep on telling until someone helps you."
- As children become more independent, be sure they use the **buddy system**. Kids are safer in groups of two or more.
- Teach children about sex and sexuality. If this embarrasses you, tell them, "The private parts of your body are the parts covered by a swimming suit. No one is allowed to touch your private parts except sometimes a doctor when mom or dad is there with you." Your children's librarian can help you find books on sexuality appropriate for any age child.
- Listen to your children when they talk about family members or other adults who make them feel uncomfortable or scared. Children's instincts are often accurate.
- Assure children that should they ever become separated from you, you will always look for them.
- Set an example of good safety habits for your child. For example, always tell kids how long you will be gone and where you can be reached. And call home if plans change! They will follow your example.
- Help your children talk freely about themselves and their feelings. Children who feel listened to are less likely to seek approval from inappropriate people.
- Know your neighbors and your children's friends and parents. Keep a list of their phone numbers and addresses.
- Be sure your child's day care center, youth organization, and school screen employees.
- Make sure the labels on kids' clothing and belongings are not visible. Knowledge of children's names can be used to gain their trust or put them off guard.

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For parents of children from birth to pre-school age

- Keep an eye on your child all the time.
- Hold toddlers by the hand or keep them in shopping carts or strollers when away from home.
- *Don't* leave kids alone in the car even for a second.
- It's time for your child to *begin* learning full name, address, phone number, and parents' names. Of course, children master these skills at different ages. Try making a game of it. Sing your address to the tune of one of their favorite songs, for example.
- Introduce the "What If" game to start teaching kids to check first before accepting treats.
- Begin teaching decision-making skills. Ask, "Which would you rather wear, your blue pajamas or your red ones?" This will help later on if children need to say no to inappropriate requests from adults.
- Children in this age group are most at risk of family abduction. Take threats of abduction from former partners seriously. Review the section on **Family Abduction Prevention**.

For parents of six- to ten-year olds

Use "What If?" games to check a child's readiness for more independence. As you act out the game, encourage children to yell "No!" loudly and quickly run to a safe place.

- "What if I was late to pick you up from school and someone offered to drive you home?" (Be sure your child knows to check first, no matter who offers. Children of separated or divorced parents should know their visitation times and check first if the other parent shows up unexpectedly.)
 - "What if you were supposed to walk home with your friend and he was sick that day? What could you do so you didn't walk alone?" (The buddy system is best for children of *all* ages. Be sure children know what you want them to do in this emergency.)
 - "What if one of the neighbors insisted that you help carry a box inside the house? Could you say no and run away and come tell me? Even if s/he scolded you? You bet you could. And I'd go back and explain our safety rules." (Adults shouldn't be asking kids for help.)
 - "What if an adult or any older person was being really friendly and offered you a treat and you thought it might sound rude to say no. Could you still say no? Sure you could!" (Adults shouldn't offer kids treats or trips without asking their parents.)
 - "What if an adult or any older person took something of yours and wanted you to get close to get it back?" (Don't take anything from anyone, even something of your own. Run away and get help.)
- A six- to ten-year-old should know:**
- Full name and parents' full names
 - Address, including state and country
 - How to make a phone call (including area code)
 - How and when to dial 9-1-1. ("When you need help right now and it can't wait.")



As parents of six- to ten-year olds, you should also:

- Know the times and route(s) your child travels to school and activities.
- Help children identify safe people and places in your neighborhood to run to for help if they feel threatened—houses, stores, phones where they can call 9-1-1.
- Encourage kids to be aware as they walk: for instance, to keep at least 3 big steps away from occupied cars.
- Remind children about private parts. Say, “No one should touch the parts of your body covered by a bathing suit, or ask you to touch theirs. If this happens to you, tell me or another trusted adult.”
- Be sure children feel comfortable “telling” by making it a family rule not to keep secrets. A child can often prevent sexual abuse by saying, “We don’t keep secrets. I’ll tell.”
- A family password can be used when you need to send someone else to pick up your child. If that person doesn’t give the password, tell your child to yell “No!” and run and get help, no matter what the person says.
- Accompany your child into public bathrooms.
- Walk your children into their new friend’s houses; meet the parents. If *you* don’t feel comfortable with the situation—don’t leave your child. Make plans for another day at *your* house.
- Call the parents before a sleepover and find out who will be there. Ask about the activities.
- Don’t let children sell door to door (or trick or treat) unless you go too.
- Be sure your children let you know where they are going, with whom, and to call you if plans change. If you are in the habit of doing this yourself, it will be easier for the kids.
- As children begin to spend time at home alone, teach them never to say you’re not there, and never to unlock the door. Have them say, “My parents can’t come to the phone (door) right now. Please call back,” and end the conversation. Tell kids who to call if they are scared or need help.
- The Internet, particularly chat rooms, online games, and instant messaging becomes more of a risk for this group. Check out the section on **Internet Abduction Prevention**. The two most important Internet rules are: always keep personal information private and never meet an online friend in person.
- Family abductions are a risk for this group, too. If you have gone through a custody dispute, be sure to review the section on **Family Abduction Prevention** or call us for our free brochure on how to protect your family.

For parents of Preteens and Teens

Many of the preceding suggestions still apply at this age. Before granting increased freedom, check out your child's ability to follow safety rules and to use good judgment. "What if?" is still a good jumping off point for discussion of new situations and rules.

- Make a deal with your kids: they can call you to pick them up any time, any place and you'll come get them. If you're angry or need to discipline, you will save it for later.
- The Internet, particularly chat rooms, online games and instant messaging poses special risks for this group. Check out the **Internet Abduction Prevention** section.
- Family abductions are a lesser risk with older teens, but if there is anger between separated parents, be sure to check the section on **Family Abduction Prevention** or call us for our free brochure on how to protect your family.
- Kids at this age are still vulnerable to predators and should recognize lures or cons from adults like asking for help or directions, offering rides or jobs, or offering to take their photograph.
- In the teen years, kids need special encouragement to "tell" if someone has tricked or harmed them.
- Educate teens about sex and sexuality, so they will be less vulnerable to sexual advances by predators.
- Watch for signs that your teen is using drugs or alcohol and seek help if you detect them. Drugs and alcohol can affect judgment and make kids more vulnerable to being exploited.
- Check out the **Internet Abduction Prevention** and **Runaway Prevention** sections.

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