

When you hear scary statistics remember:

# 99.8% of the children who go missing do come home\*

*The Polly Klaas® Foundation is a nationally recognized authority in the field of missing children. We help find missing children and prevent children from going missing in the first place.*

- Nearly 90% of missing children have simply misunderstood directions or miscommunicated their plans, are lost, or have run away.
- 9% are kidnapped by a family member in a custody dispute.
- 3% are abducted by non-family members, usually during the commission of a crime such as robbery or sexual assault. The kidnapper is often someone the child knows.
- Only about 100 children (a fraction of 1%) are kidnapped each year in the stereotypical stranger abductions you hear about in the news.

And about half of these 100 come home.

## The truth

Traffic hazards are a much greater danger to your child than a kidnapper. All parents teach their kids how to cross the street. It's no big deal. We give them the rules and help them practice until they show us they **know** what to do and can be trusted to **do it**.

## Here's the good news

We can teach kids what to do if lost or approached by someone questionable in the same way we teach them how to cross the street. This kit will show you how.

We'll start with what to do if they are lost. Turn to the "What If" game—a game to teach safety without scaring your child (or yourself).

\*National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children, 2002, U.S. Department of Justice





## “What If” Game

- You say to your child: “What if we were out at the store and you looked around and you couldn’t see me? Who would you go to for help?”
- Your child might answer: “A policeman.”
- “That’s right, you could go to a policeman. But if you didn’t see a policeman nearby could you go to the cashier?”
- “And if you didn’t see a cashier, could you go to a mom with kids? Sure you could.”
- “And how could you ask for help? Could you tell the cashier your full name, and then say, ‘Can you help me find my mom?’”
- “Okay, so you’ve asked someone for help. Now you need to stay there and wait until I come and get you. Can you do that?”
- “What if someone tried to make you go with him? What could you do then?”
- “That’s right! Yell and scream. Yell ‘No, you’re not my dad (mom)!’ Can you do that? Let’s practice it together!”

This is the first and most important lesson in abduction prevention. It teaches a child to assess the situation, decide to seek help, find a safe person to ask for help, how to ask, how not to be lured away, and how to yell, **“No!”**

## Three suggestions

- Play “What If” for anything on the Key Safety Practices list or in the Abduction Prevention Guidelines section.
- If your child is reluctant to play “What If” try reversing the roles. “You be the grown-up and I’ll be the kid.” Hearing mom yell, “No, you’re not my dad!” cracks kids up but they still learn from it.
- Just be sure not to phrase the “What if” in a scary way. Say: “What if you were walking home and saw someone you felt nervous about?” Don’t say, “What if a big pickup pulled up and a stranger jumped out?”

## Three good reasons not to use the word “stranger”

- Children think “strangers” are dirty and scary looking. But most people who intend to harm children are careful to look nice and act friendly.
- There’s more risk from people a child knows than from strangers.
- If you’ve based your safety plan on warning kids about “strangers,” they’ll be handicapped in getting help from someone they don’t know.

Finally, how much time will your safety training plan take? Spend at least as much time on abduction prevention as you do on street crossing safety. Tell kids what you expect, play “What If” games, and don’t turn them loose until they’ve mastered the rules.

# Key safety practices

## For kids to know

- Your name, address, telephone number, and parents' names.
- Check first. If any older person offers you something or invites you somewhere, ask mom or dad first.
- Hang with a friend. Kids are safer in groups.
- It's not your fault if someone hurts you or tricks you. Be sure to tell a trusted adult—it's not tattling.
- If home alone, keep doors and windows locked. Don't let anyone in, not even a policeman, without checking first with a parent.
- Kids should yell "No," run away, and tell if an adult breaks any of these rules:
  - Adults don't need to ask kids for help.
  - Adults should not offer anything to a kid.
  - Adults should not ask kids to keep secrets.
  - No one should touch a kid's private parts (parts covered by a swimsuit) or ask a kid to touch their own or another's private parts.

## How kids can get help

- Find a safe adult like a mom with kids or a cashier, ask for help, then stay there and wait, don't go looking for mom or dad.
- If you feel threatened yell, "No! You're not my mom (or dad)!" Run away and get help.
- Break the rules if you're in danger. Yell, run, drop your books, and even knock over boxes in the store to get attention.
- It's okay to call 9-1-1 if you need help right away.



## And for parents

- Say "I love you."
- Respect kids' instincts. If they feel weird about something, there's probably a reason. Help them figure out what to do.
- Check out the **Internet Abduction Prevention, Runaway Prevention, and Family Abduction Prevention** sections.
- Teaching safety is an on-going process, but it doesn't have to be scary. Start now, but expect to return to the topic all the way through the teen years. The **Abduction Prevention Guidelines** section provides more information.

**800-587-4357**