

# Child Safety Tips

brought to you by the  
San Diego District Attorney's Office

Making your home a place of trust and support is the most important thing a parent can do. Children who feel ignored or neglected are more vulnerable to abduction or exploitation. So remember, *there is no substitute for attention and supervision.*



Here are some tips to help keep children safe.

## 1. Know where your children are at all times.

- Know your children's friends and where they live. Make it a rule that your children check in with you whenever they go places or change their plans.
- Update addresses and phone numbers of your children's friends. Get to know their parents.

## 2. Never leave your children unattended in a public place or in a car.

- Don't ever leave young children alone in a car – EVER – not even to briefly run into a house or store. Don't think they're safe if the doors are locked and the alarm is activated. Abductors can break into any vehicle in a matter of seconds.
- Teach your children what to do if you become separated. Instruct them how to use the telephone and dial home or 9-1-1.

## 3. Keep your windows and doors locked.

- It sounds simple, yet a surprising number of people leave the doors and windows to their homes unlocked. Day or night, many predators break into homes through unlocked doors and windows.
- Always lock your car doors whether you're driving or parked.

## 4. Select caregivers with care.

- Screen babysitters and day care providers. Use public registries such as the San Diego YMCA's Child Resources Registry at [www.ymcacrs.org](http://www.ymcacrs.org).

Check references and drop in unexpectedly to see how your children are doing. Ask your child about the caregiver and listen to the response.

- Be alert to a teenager or adult who is paying an unusual amount of attention to your children, or giving them inappropriate or expensive gifts.

**5. In a non-frightening way, explain to your children tactics child abductors might use. Teach your children how to respond.**

- Child abductors use tricks to lure children. "Can you help me find my puppy?" "Can you tell me how to get to the store?" "Can you help me carry this package?" Predators use these tactics often and effectively. Discuss these scenarios with your children.



- [What to teach your children.](#)

**6. Be aware of your surroundings and watch your children.**

- Children often disappear when parents or caregivers are distracted. More than half of the children kidnapped by strangers are taken from a vehicle, a park or the street. Watch your children -- never assume someone else is taking care of them.
- Young children under the age of six should not play unsupervised. Experts say young children are simply too trusting and too vulnerable to play alone.
- When you go to busy places (a store, the fair, an amusement park), keep younger children in strollers. Use "hand holders," Velcro bracelets with bungee cords, or even a harness to keep children close.

**7. Take your children into public restrooms with you.**

- A public restroom is no place for unaccompanied children. No matter what gender your children are, take them into the stall with you. Unfortunately, even older children have been abducted, assaulted, and murdered in public restrooms. So, don't put your children in harm's way for the sake of modesty. Take them with you.

## 8. Practice “what if” scenarios.

- Rehearse safety skills so they become second nature. You may think your children understand your concerns and will do what you tell them, but they need constant reinforcement. Just as your children practice fire drills, they should practice safety drills.

## 9. Map out safe areas for your children.

- Walk to school with your children and identify vacant lots, alleys and other locations that could be dangerous. Draw a map showing acceptable routes to school, using main roads and avoiding shortcuts and isolated areas. If your children take a bus, visit the bus stop with them. Update maps and route information regularly.



## 10. Don't display your child's name on clothing, backpacks and other items.

- Predators look for ways to start conversations with children. Personalized items may provide them with an opening that puts them on a “first name” basis with your child.

## 11. Explain the concept of “stranger” to your children.

- Instead of telling your children not to talk to “strangers,” teach them to be alert for threatening behaviors and situations. “Stranger” is not an easy concept for children to understand. Once a person has said, “Hi sweetie, what’s your name?,” a child may no longer view that person as a stranger. Children are also under the mistaken impression strangers are scary looking. Discuss ways to identify potentially dangerous circumstances.
- Keep in mind that certain kinds of “strangers” can assist your children when they need help. Tell your children to look for mothers with children, other children, police in uniform, or store clerks in the mall if they need help.

**12. Choose a secret word to use in an emergency.**

- Children are vulnerable to common ploys by predators. "Your mom's been in an accident, and I'm here to pick you up--" is a typical ruse used by kidnapers. Choose a secret word to be used only in emergencies. Rehearse it with your child, and make sure you tell them not to share it with anyone else.

**13. Keep updated photos, descriptions, and records of your children.**

- Be prepared for the *remote* possibility that your child may one day be missing. Keep a complete and updated written description of your child, including hair color, eye color, height, weight and date of birth. Also, make note of other physical characteristics like eyeglasses, braces, and pierced ears.
- Take color photographs of your child every six months and keep a current photo with you in case something happens while you're away from home. Know where your child's dental and medical records are located.
- Arrange to have your child fingerprinted by professionals at your local police department. Keep a DNA sample of your child, such as a saliva swab. There are child identification kits available through the Internet.



**14. Speak openly about safety issues and listen carefully to what your child says.**

- Children need to know they can talk to you and that you'll listen and be sensitive to what they say. If children feel you're uncomfortable discussing something, they may be reluctant to talk about it. Don't avoid subjects your children want to discuss.
- Consider a child's age when talking to them and deliver information in an age-appropriate way. Younger children benefit from role-playing and repetitive messages. Older children can learn from current events or real cases. Keep in mind the following --
  - 3-5 year-olds are curious and naturally trusting. They may not recognize potentially dangerous situations.

- 6-9 year-olds are able to remember information and put it to use, but may be overwhelmed in a difficult situation.
- 10-13 year-olds may overestimate their ability to handle a bad situation. They may also have a casual attitude about their risk.
- Children over 12 can also be victims. While it's appropriate to give them more freedom, make sure they understand the importance of safety.

## What to Teach Your Children

Review the safety measures above to help you protect your children. Using the following guidelines, teach your children about safety.

### 1. If you get separated from your parents, find help right away.

- If you're lost, don't wander around looking for your parents. Go to a checkout counter or security office and tell the person in charge you have lost your mom or dad and need help finding them.

### 2. Use the Buddy System.

- Don't go places alone. Always travel with a friend, even if you're just walking to school or riding a bicycle in the neighborhood. Stay with the group while waiting at the bus stop. Don't play in parks, malls or video arcades by yourself. It's safer and more fun to be with your friends.



### 3. Run, run, run.

- You must be aware of your surroundings. If anyone bothers you, follows you, or makes you uncomfortable, get away from the person as quickly as you can. Always tell your parents or a trusted adult what happened.

- If someone attempts to take you somewhere, try to get away from them. Yell or scream, "This man is trying to take me away," or "This person is not my mother."

#### **4. Beware of People in Cars - Get Away.**

- If someone in a car drives close to you, move away as quickly as possible. When walking down a street, walk on the sidewalk against traffic.

#### **5. Don't accept things from strangers.**

- Do not take candy, money, gifts or rides from an adult without a parent's permission. Also, don't let anyone take your picture without your parents' approval.

#### **6. Tell your parents if your plans change.**

- Your parents should always know where you are and where you're going. Always ask a parent's permission to leave the yard, a play area, or to visit someone's home.

#### **7. Do not tell anyone your parents aren't home.**

- If you're home alone and someone calls on the phone for your parents, tell the caller they're busy and can't come to the phone. If you go home by yourself after school, check to see that everything is okay before you go inside. Once inside, call your parents to let them know you are safe. Don't open the door for anyone unless that person is a trusted family friend or relative.



#### **8. Trust your instincts and learn to say "no."**

- Be assertive. You have the right to say "no" to someone who tries to take you somewhere, touches you, or makes you feel uncomfortable or scared. It's more important for you to get out of a threatening situation than to be polite.

## 9. Know important information you may need in an emergency.

- Know your address, telephone numbers and parents' names and how to contact them at all times.

## 10. What if a stranger enters your house or forces you into his car?

- Ask your parents where and how to hide in case someone breaks into the house. Find a location that wouldn't be obvious to an intruder. Practice being quiet.
- If someone pushes you into a car, don't go quietly. Draw attention to yourself. Scream, kick, bite, and fight off your attacker. Try to communicate with people in other cars—any way you can. It's important to get away from your kidnapper as fast as possible.

## How to Talk to Your Children About Community Tragedies

Both parents and children are alarmed and frustrated by recent child abductions, locally, and in other parts of the country. Many of us have trouble sleeping at night because we worry about how to protect our families.



The most effective tools at our disposal are the tips listed on the previous pages. Review them regularly to keep them fresh in your mind. Pass them on to your children so they know what to do in an emergency.

If a child is kidnapped in your community, and your children want to talk about what happened, discuss it with them. Be frank, yet reassuring. Don't unnecessarily frighten your children. Help them separate fact from fantasy. Put the event into context and explain that, although frightening things happen to children on rare occasions, most children are never harmed.

Monitor what your children are exposed to in the media, and what they're talking about with friends. Be sensitive to changes in their behavior, especially sleeping problems and nightmares. Avoid communicating your own anxiety to your children. If you are feeling overwhelmed, afraid, or anxious,

take steps to deal with your own feelings. Seek professional help if necessary.

Encourage your kids to express their feelings and concerns. Show them that many adults are doing everything possible to ensure their safety and remind them of precautions they can take. Be aware that children who have experienced a traumatic incident in the past, such as a chronic illness, or personal tragedy, may be more susceptible to anxiety.

## What To Do If Your Child is Missing

If you believe your child is missing, it is critical that you act **immediately** and **call the police**. Request that your child's name and identifying information be immediately entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File to ensure other law-enforcement agencies will be alerted. Next, limit access to your home until law enforcement arrives and has the opportunity to collect possible evidence. When officers respond, give them all of the information you have on your child.

## Resources

For more information or to help find missing children, contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

Child Abuse Prevention Foundation - [www.capfsd.com](http://www.capfsd.com)

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Department of Justice - [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/missing.html](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/missing.html)

Federal Bureau of Investigation's Crimes Against Children Program - [www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/crimesmain.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/crimesmain.htm)

McGruff the Crime Dog - information on child safety, identification, abduction, fingerprinting, and crime prevention - [www.mcgruff-safe-kids.com](http://www.mcgruff-safe-kids.com)

Klaas Kids Foundation - [www.klaaskids.org](http://www.klaaskids.org)

Child Watch - [www.childwatch.com](http://www.childwatch.com)

