

IF MY CHILD IS MISSING

Act immediately if you believe that your child is missing.

- If your child is missing from home, search the house checking closets, piles of laundry, in and under beds, inside old refrigerators—wherever a child may crawl or hide.
- If you still cannot find your child, immediately call your local law-enforcement agency.
- If your child disappears in a store, notify the store manager or security office. Then immediately call your local law-enforcement agency. Many stores have a plan of action—if a child is missing in the store, employees immediately mobilize to look for the missing child.
- When you call law enforcement, provide your child's name, date of birth, height, weight, and any other unique identifiers such as eyeglasses and braces. Tell them when you noticed that your child was missing and what clothing he or she was wearing.
- Request that your child's name and identifying information be immediately entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File.
- After you have reported your child missing to law enforcement, call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children on our toll-free telephone number, 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678). www.missingkids.com

Q&A on Child Safety

What are the most important things a parent should know when talking to a child about this issue?

1. Don't forget your older children. Children aged 11 to 17 are equally at risk to victimization. At the same time you are giving your older children more freedom, make sure they understand important safety rules as well.
2. When you speak to your children, do so in a calm, nonthreatening manner. Children do not need to be frightened to get the point across. Fear can actually work at cross-purposes to the safety message, because fear can be paralyzing to a child.
3. Speak openly about safety issues. Children will be less likely to come to you if the issue is enshrouded in secrecy. If they feel that you are comfortable discussing the subject matter, they may be more forthcoming to you.
4. Do not confuse children with the concept of “strangers.” Children do not have the same understanding of who a stranger is as an adult might. The “stranger-danger” message is not effective; as danger to children is much greater from someone you or they know than from a “stranger.”
5. Practice what you talk about. You may think your children understand your message, but until they can incorporate it into their daily lives, it may not be clearly understood. Find opportunities to practice “what if” scenarios.
6. Teach your children that it is more important to get out of a threatening situation, than it is to be polite. They also need to know that it is okay to tell you what happened, and they won't be a tattletale.

What are the most important things a parent should tell a child about this issue?

1. Children should always check first with you or a trusted adult before they go anywhere, accept anything, or get into a car with anyone. This applies to older children as well.
2. Children should not go out alone and should always take a friend with them when they go places or play outside.
3. It's okay to say no if someone tries to touch them or treats them in a way that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused and to get out of the situation as quickly as possible.
4. Children need to know that they can tell you or a trusted adult if they feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
5. Children need to know that there will always be someone to help them, and they have the right to be safe.

What is the biggest myth surrounding this issue?

The biggest myth is that the dangers to children come from strangers. In the majority of cases, the perpetrator is someone the parents or child knows, and that person may be in a position of trust or responsibility to the child and family.

What advice would you offer a parent who wanted to talk to their child about this issue?

Parents should choose opportunities or “teachable” moments to reinforce safety skills. If an incident occurs in your community, and your child asks you about it, speak frankly but with reassurance. Explain to your children that you want to discuss the safety rules with them, so that they will know what to do if they are ever confronted with a difficult situation. Make sure you have “safety nets” in place, so that your children know there is always someone who can help them.

For more safety tips, go to www.missingkids.com.