

CHILD ABDUCTION

STRANGERS ARE NOT ALWAYS EVIL LOOKING

Child molesters and abductors usually look like everyday people. When questioned, children will often describe a “stranger” as someone who is “ugly or mean.” They don’t perceive nice-looking or friendly people as “strangers.” And if someone talks to a child or is even around a child more than once, that person loses his or her “stranger” status. The child then thinks he or she “knows” the person. Tell your kids not to talk to adults they do not know. Anytime they are approached by an adult they should check with a parent or trusted adult immediately.

BUT, ARE ALL STRANGERS DANGEROUS?

When we tell children to “never talk to strangers” we have effectively eliminated a key source of help for them if they are in trouble. If they’re lost they may be surrounded by many “strangers” who could conceivably help them if they would only ask for it. We need to give children “safety nets” of people they can go to if they need help. Those individuals may include uniformed law-enforcement or security officers, a store salesperson with a nametag, the person in an information booth at a mall or other public venue, or a mother with children.

HOW CHILD MOLESTERS GAIN A CHILD’S CONFIDENCE

Children want to be helpful, thrive on adult approval, and respond to adult authority. So, if someone with ill intent asks them to perform a task or tells them something has happened to a loved one, chances are good the child can be tricked. Often times they will befriend a child by asking for help. Some examples are: Asking to help find a lost pet; asking directions to someone’s house; offering reward money for assistance; saying Mom or Dad have been hurt or need their help; acting like an undercover police officer (children should only approach uniformed police officers, and/or marked police cars).

They may also gain your child’s trust by very minor contacts over several days, such as saying hello to them repeatedly. Make sure your children know to tell you if a stranger is trying to make friends with them.

CHILDREN ARE MOST VULNERABLE WHEN ALONE

Individuals who prey on children wait for an opportunity when the child is alone. Children should not be outside their home by themselves, even for short periods of time. They should walk to and from school and bus stops in groups.

Working together with other families in your neighborhood to develop a formal plan for kids to walk together is a good idea.

TELL CHILDREN TO STAY AWAY FROM CARS

A car or other vehicle is often the means by which the abductor removes the child from the neighborhood. Children should never approach a vehicle unless they are absolutely sure they know the occupants. Abductors entice children to walk near their vehicles and then pull them inside.

If children routinely see the same car parked (or following them) on their normal walking routes (to and from school, etc.) they should report it to trusted adults immediately.

ROLE PLAY WITH YOUR KIDS

Act like a stranger and see how your children react. Teach them the proper way to respond. Kids should:

- Run away
- Yell loudly

- Say exactly what is happening.
Examples:
 - “Help, this is not my Dad.”
 - “Help, this is not my Mom.”
 - “Help, I’m being kidnapped.”
 - “Help, call the police.”
 - “I don’t know you, leave me alone.”

If children just scream, people may think they are only throwing a temper tantrum.

REPORT ANY SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY IMMEDIATELY

Talk to your children about safety practices on a daily basis. Children do not put the same emphasis on suspicious activity as adults. Asking them direct questions (“Did you talk to anyone new today?”) may bring suspicious acts to light. If they report anything suspicious call the nearest local law enforcement agency or the nearest State Police District.

TIPS FOR REPORTING SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY

Obtain the following information and report it immediately:

SUSPICIOUS VEHICLE

1. License plate number and state
2. Color of vehicle
3. Body style (2 doors, 4 doors, Van, SUV, etc.)
4. Location and direction of travel
5. Description of occupants

SUSPICIOUS PERSON

1. Race
2. Sex
3. Clothing (hat, jacket, shirt, pants, shoes)
4. Facial Features
Hair color Hair length Mustache, beard Glasses Scars Missing teeth
5. Tattoos
6. Height
7. Weight
8. Location and direction of travel

IMMEDIATELY REPORT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY

- **Children should try to stay in groups** – There is strength in numbers. In most cases of child abduction the child has been alone.
- **Take time to know your surroundings** – Be aware that the most dangerous times can be just before and after school.
- **Walk away from streets** – Children should stay on sidewalks or at least six feet from the street.
- **Stay away from cars** – Children should never approach a car or truck no matter what the occupants say.
- **YELL AND TELL** – If someone grabs a child, the child should scream and yell out **“HELP ME – CALL THE POLICE.”**
- **RECOGNIZE, REACT, AND REPORT** – When children think they see danger, they should immediately run and tell an adult.

*Edited from: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
Illinois State Police*

RESOURCES TO CONTACT and/or ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Safe2Tell (to make an anonymous report 887-542-SAFE) (www.safe2tell.org)
- Colorado School Safety Resource Center (for workshops and trainings)
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (800-843-5678) (www.missingkids.com)
- Local Law Enforcement Agency