Building Strong Families
Help Your Child Learn To Be Safe In All Situations

What children need to know about strangers

Young children often think "strangers" are people they've never seen before. They also visualize them as mean or unfriendly. In reality, many individuals who hurt young children are familiar to them. Even if this is not the case, these individuals usually try to gain a child's confidence by appearing kind and friendly.

Tell children that a stranger is anyone they don't know well. Teach children to follow safety rules with total strangers and family acquaintances. Strangers include the cashier you see weekly at the grocery store, the paper carrier who comes daily, or the friendly person on the playground. A stranger can be male or female, young or old. Avoid stereotyping strangers by gender, race or age.

Safety away from home

Children between the ages 8 and 11, especially girls, are the most common victims of child molestation. Evidence also exists that the number of boy victims may be increasing.

Children who are without adult supervision should walk or play with friends whenever possible and stay in populated areas, avoiding dark or isolated places.

When strangers talk to your children, they should keep walking without speaking and should immediately tell an adult.

Children who are being followed should immediately go to a public place or friend's house for help. They should not go home if no one is there. They should not go to a deserted area. If someone approaches or tries to grab them, children should scream, "Help!" and try to run away and get help from an adult.

Arriving home when no one is there

If doors and windows look normal, they can go in and lock the door. (Remind them to remove the key from the lock after opening the door.) If something looks funny, however, or if they think that someone is in the house, children should rush to a neighbor's house or an agreed-upon safe place and call the police.

Leave an extra key with a neighbor or in a secret location in case children lose their key or get locked out. Never hide keys outside. If your children can find it, so can someone else.