

Kidpower Safety Tips: Protecting Children from Stranger Abduction/Kidnapping

By Kidpower Executive Director/Co-Founder Irene van der Zande

- 1. Teach kids to get help if anything seems unsafe.** Help kids learn to interrupt you and other adults if they think something might not be safe. They can practice saying, "I see you are busy, but this is about safety. Please listen." Adults can practice saying, "Thank you for interrupting me. Safety comes first." Remember that children are most likely to be harmed by someone they know rather than by a stranger. Helping them build the habit of talking with you about problems will help keep them safe.
- 2. Use the word 'stranger' calmly and accurately so kids understand more and worry less.** A stranger is just a person you don't know well. Everyone is a stranger to almost everyone else. Point out strangers on the sidewalk, at a park, and in magazines so kids learn a stranger can be a man, woman, or child of any age or ability. Kidpower teaches children that most people are good and this means that most strangers are good. Although a few strangers might bother you, you don't need to worry – you just need to use your Stranger Safety habits.
- 3. Make and practice safety plans for getting help.** Talk with kids about who they could get help from everywhere they go. Practice how to interrupt busy adults like storekeepers, librarians, or cashiers. Remind kids that these people are strangers, too, and you believe they will help in an emergency. Practicing helps kids take charge of their safety with confidence if you get separated at a park, fair, store, and other public places.
- 4. Teach kids the difference between being 'together' and 'on your own.'** The safety rules are different when you are together and when you are on your own. For younger kids, 'together' means being very close by their own adults who are paying attention to what they are doing. A child sitting on the front porch while Mom goes inside, even just for a minute, is on his own. A teen in a crowded store is together with people who can help her. A teen in an empty part of a mall is on her own.
- 5. Teach kids about personal information.** Personal information is any information about you, ways to contact you, or where you live or go to school. This includes your name, phone number, address, family members' names, the name of your school, friends' names, etc. The truth is, sometimes we do give personal information to strangers: we give personal information to the strangers working at our doctor's office, and a child might give a home number to someone working in a store if they are getting help in an emergency. The safety rule is that children should never give personal information to stranger without checking first with the adults who are responsible for their safety. Teach children to walk away with awareness and confidence and without talking if a stranger starts asking about their personal information.
- 6. Help younger kids practice how to 'Move Away and Check First.'** Stranger Safety habits for young kids who are on their own, even just for a minute, include: (1) Move Away and Check First before talking to a stranger; (2) Move Away and Check First before taking things from a stranger, and (3) Move Away and Check First before going anywhere with a stranger, unless you are having an emergency and can't Check First.
- 7. Help older kids and teens practice how to 'Think First.'** Older kids, teens, and adults are safer when they Think First first before talking to a stranger when they are on their own. They don't have to

talk. Help them practice what to do if they choose to talk: keep responses short ("I don't know," "Over there," or "It's two o'clock"), keep walking, and don't give personal information.

8. Practice yelling and running to get help. Teach children to use their voices and bodies to get away when someone is acting in a scary way. Explain that your voice can get the attention of people who can help you. Have children practice yelling "NO! STOP!" using a voice that is loud and strong. Have them practice yelling, "I NEED HELP" while running to a person who can help them.

9. Teach kids how to use physical self-defense in an emergency. Strong resistance can stop most assaults. Young people often fear getting in trouble for fighting, or they don't know how to use their bodies to resist. They need to know when and how to fight to protect themselves. Explore the option of age-appropriate self-defense training through programs such as Kidpower. Explain that fighting is a last resort for getting away from a dangerous situation, and not to be used just because you are upset with someone. However, if someone is about to harm you and you cannot leave or get help at first, your safety plan is to hit, kick, and yell until you can get away and get help.