

KEEPING KIDS SAFE FROM PREDATORS

The basic skills every child needs to know

Julie Costakis

During a field trip to a local museum, a school chaperone allows her group a little freedom to step outside and enjoy the view along the White River Canal. Although students are all around, no one notices a man with an impressive camera strike up a conversation with one of the girls. He asks to take a photo on a nearby canal bridge, complimenting her "supermodel looks." Her usual guardedness is momentarily disarmed by the unexpected flattery, and he moves close enough to nudge her toward the bridge. Would your child know what to do in this situation?

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children documented 9,000 attempted child abductions between 2005 and 2014. The most common abduction play is offering a child a ride, followed by tempting with candy or asking a question. Abductors also appealed to children by showing, offering or asking them to help look for an animal. Promising a chance at modeling or stardom is another tactic abductors use to tempt older children, who often dream of being "discovered" for fashion photography or acting.

"Teaching children to recognize and avoid potentially dangerous situations is highly effective," says Nancy McBride, Regional Executive Director with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Half of the successful escapes documented by NCMEC were children running from the suspect. Yelling, kicking, pulling away and adult rescue were other means of escape. "Children should be taught to do everything possible to resist and flee from someone trying to grab them," says McBride. "Instruct kids to draw attention to themselves and loudly yell, 'This person is trying to take me!' or 'This person is not my father/mother!'" While new safety products exist such as ATEK's FLIP (a smart locator device worn on a child's wrist with a one-touch button to call a parent), there is no substitute for a proactive safety plan.

Begin the conversation early

As soon as possible, begin age-appropriate conversations about personal safety. Encourage your child to tell you whenever he or she was made to feel uncomfortable or threatened. Openly communicate about the subject even through the college years. Excellent discussion guides for every age level are available on www.take25.org/

Resources

The basics

Every child should be educated to do the following:

- Be able to communicate their full name, address and telephone number.

- Listen to their gut about who feels trustworthy and who does not.
- Say "NO!" and tell a trusted adult when they are made to feel uncomfortable or threatened.
- Differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable touch.
- Make a scene, yell, scream, kick or run if anyone tries to grab them.
- Never approach a vehicle, accept a ride or gifts, or talk to strangers without permission.
- Ask a parent before changing scheduled plans.
- Remember to stay in groups and not walk alone.
- Know where the "safe havens" are along a designated walking route.

Rehearsing possible scenarios

As parents, we pray that our children will never encounter an exploitation or abduction situation. Unfortunately, potential predators can be very sophisticated in their tactics. Parents should discuss with their children the types of situations in which kids could be taken advantage of. Talk specifically about what they should do if they were ever to encounter a similar situation. Look for teachable moments to reinforce these messages. Also, review your rules about personal safety before an activity or event that separates you.

Warning signs children should recognize

Kids should be taught to tell their parent immediately if any of the following happens:

- They are asked to do something without permission or to keep a secret.
- They are offered gifts, animals, money or "stardom."
- They are made to feel uncomfortable, scared or confused.
- They are asked for help from a stranger, or to approach a car or follow someone.
- They are pressured to do something dangerous or inappropriate.

The danger at home

"One misunderstanding parents have is that danger to their children is greatest from strangers, when in actuality, more abductions and exploitations involve people familiar to the family," says McBride.

"Parents and guardians are also mistaken by assuming older children are fully prepared to handle these situations." McBride recommends reading "Know the Rules: Abduction and Harm Prevention Tips for Parents and Guardians" for more information on this subject. (www.missingkids.com/en_US/publications/NC60.pdf)

As parents, we must keep our children safe while still allowing them to take full advantage of all the experiences the world has to offer them. By teaching kids how to recognize and react to potentially dangerous situations, we better equip them to feel confident in their own ability to keep themselves safe.

It's Your Time to Celebrate

at Gaylord Opryland Resort



Up to \$100 Resort Credit!

Valid Through December 30, 2014

Make any occasion special with a resort credit up to \$100

Whether a milestone celebration or this day you ran a mile, we will help make any occasion extra special by offering you a \$50 per night resort credit up to \$100 per stay. Enjoy something spectacular with our signature class, endorsed dining, filled with lush gardens and winding waterways. Luxurious spa treatments, delicious dining, unique shopping and fun entertainment options provide everything you need for a joyous occasion.

Book your getaway today! GaylordOpryland.com

or call (888) 677-9972 (refer to promo code ZJU)



OPRYLAND LOCATIONS
Gaylord Opryland Resort
Nashville, TN
Gaylord National
Gaylord Palms
Horseshoe Bend
Horseshoe Bend
Horseshoe Bend




Valid through December 30, 2014. Limited number of credits available for this promotion. Offer does not apply to repeat or 30+ room stays. Offer cannot be combined with any other promotion. Limit one (1) \$50 resort credit per night (maximum of \$100 per stay). A stay is defined as consecutive nights at the same hotel, regardless of check-in/check-out dates. See website for complete terms and conditions.