

Reprinted from contemporary pediatrics -- guide for parents -- March 2005

As a parent, you can do many things to make your child a difficult target for kidnappers and sexual predators. Here are age-appropriate suggestions from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Polly Klaas Foundation. In addition, consider putting together a child identification kit that contains personally identifiable information, including photos, and update information at least once a year.

A preschooler should

- Always be under the direct supervision of an adult.
- Be taught his (her) full name, address, phone number, and how to dial 911.
- If lost, seek assistance of a uniformed police officer, store cashier, or a woman with a child.
- Always ask your permission before accepting a gift or going somewhere with someone

A school-aged child should

- Never go anywhere unaccompanied and always use the buddy system.
- Let you know, where he is and where he is going, and his approximate times of arrival and departure.
- Keep a safe distance (10 feet or more) from a car with someone in it, and never get into a car, unless you have given permission to do so.
- Be informed that adults do not need to ask a child for directions or help finding a lost animal or child.
- Never tell a phone caller that you aren't home or open the door if someone knocks if he is home alone. A latchkey child also needs to know who to call in an emergency.
- Scream "No" or say "Fire" when threatened. Such action immediately attracts attention and is an effective maneuver for thwarting an abductor.
- If followed, run to a safe place, a store, or anywhere there are lots of people.

A teenager should

- Continue to use the buddy system when going anywhere, and let you know where she is. (Consider providing a cell phone to a responsible teenager, to make it easier for her communicate her whereabouts to you.)
- Been made aware that drugs and alcohol impair judgment, rendering a person more susceptible to exploitation.
- Check out the house before entering when arriving home; lock the door behind her; and call you to let you know, she has arrived.
- Never tell a phone caller that you are not home.