



PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN
by
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Nothing frightens us more than the fear of something happening to our children. The fear of an abduction, sexual assault, or other violent crime committed against our children causes most parents to worry. Because children cannot look out for themselves, it is our responsibility to look out for them. It is critical that we effectively teach children about safety and protection measures.

What can you do to protect your children?

1. **Communicate regularly and effectively with your kids about safety issues.** Most parents have talked with their children about what they should and should not do but studies have shown that lecturing children about the do's and don'ts may not always be effective. For example, many parents will tell their kids: "Don't talk to strangers. Never get in a car with a stranger. Always tell mommy if someone touches you where they should not, etc." When you have these discussions with your children, they seem to understand the importance of what you are saying. But will they remember if something should happen? Instead of just lecturing your kids about how to protect themselves, the better approach is to role play with your children. Kids will remember safety tips much better when taught during role play.
2. **Role play possible scenarios with your kids rather than lecturing them.** Instead of telling your children how to protect themselves, create as many different scenarios as you can think of and then **ask your child what they would do**. For example, ask your child what they would do if a nice man or lady came up to them and said, "I am Mr./Mrs. Smith from up the street, Your mother has been in an accident and I need to take you to the hospital." What would you do? **Role play the correct responses with your child such as running, screaming, never approaching cars, etc.** (See list of more role play examples).
3. **Teach kids to yell, "This man/woman is not my father/mother" if someone is grabbing them.** If they do not say this, too many people will ignore a screaming child being pulled by an adult assuming the child is misbehaving for their parent.
4. **Do not use the term "strangers" when talking to your children about who to avoid.** Many children are abducted or exploited by people who have some type of familiarity with them. Also, many children think of a stranger as someone who is mean, ugly or creepy. **The problem with telling your kids not to talk to strangers is that the bad guys don't always look bad.** A neighbor, a familiar

face, or someone whose name the child knows is often not viewed as a stranger to the child.

5. **Make sure kids understand when it is okay to be a tattletale.** We often tell our kids not to be tattletales. Children must be taught that if something is happening in their lives that makes them feel uncomfortable, they **MUST** tell somebody they trust. They need to be assured that they can always come to you and you will believe them.
6. **Be aware that most children are sexually abused by someone you know.** Be alert to a teenager or adult who is paying an unusual amount of attention to your child or giving them inappropriate or expensive gifts. Watch for signs of sexual abuse such as: changes in behavior, fearfulness, excessive crying, aggressive behavior, acting out inappropriate sexual activity, nightmares, or a fear of going to bed.
7. **Be familiar with the Sheriff's web site on sex offenders and share this information with your neighbors.**
(<http://www.co.summit.oh.us/sheriff/sexoffenderdisclaimer.htm>)

Finally, while this is a scary subject, it is important that you do your best to educate your children without paralyzing them with fear. You need to talk to your child in a calm and reassuring manner. Be careful not to discuss the frightening details of what might happen if they do not follow the safety guidelines. We all want our children to grow up to be confident, self-reliant and not be consumed by fear.

If you belong to a group who would be interested in hearing a child protection speech from Prosecutor Walsh, please call or write to:

Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh
Summit County Prosecutor's Office
53 University Avenue
Akron, OH 44308
(330) 643-2796

ROLE PLAY EXAMPLES

Ask your children what they would do with each example. Insert names of neighbors, family friends and relatives with some of the below examples:

1. A nice man in a suit stops his car and asks you for directions?
(Remind kids that adults do not ask kids for directions.)
2. A man or woman comes up to you and says, "Have you seen my puppy? Will you help me find my puppy? Can you come over to my car so I can show you a picture of my puppy?"
3. Someone tells you your mom/dad has been in an accident and they need to take you to the hospital.
4. Someone you don't know calls you by name and tells you your mom/dad asked them to pick you up.
5. Someone tells you he is a police officer and shows you a badge. He asks you to help him find a friend of yours who is missing.
6. Your friend tells you someone is sexually touching her and makes you promise to keep it a secret.
7. Someone touches you and tells you to keep it a secret or you will get in trouble. They say that no one will believe you since you are just a kid.
8. Someone touches you and tells you that if you tell, they will hurt your mommy/daddy/dog.

Also use the above examples with names of acquaintances.