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## Tips for Parents—Stranger Danger

*Stranger Danger is an ineffective way to teach our children about how to be safe. Children imagine strangers as scary, creepy people. When kids were shown pictures of a variety of people they didn't know, only the ones made to look scary or strange were identified as strangers that might abduct or hurt them. They weren't concerned about grandmotherly or pretty women, or kind looking men.*

**Statistics show** that many more children are molested/abducted/killed by people they know than by strangers. Often, it is an acquaintance or friend of the family, or even a relative that harms a child. Many child sex offenders are especially good at attaining positions working with children such as teaching, counseling, or coaching. Over and over I've heard people say about accused sex offenders, "He was such a nice person. I just can't believe he'd do something like this." Be extremely careful about who you teach your child is a "Safe Grownup". Just because they are in a position of trust (doctor, pastor, counselor, coach, etc.) doesn't mean they are Trustworthy. The most important thing a parent can do when they aren't sure who they can trust or not is to accompany the child. If you're unsure about a new coach, stay with your child at practice.

**Certain types/personalities of children are more susceptible to abuse.** They include children with special needs, children in foster homes, shy children that don't fit in well socially, and children whose mothers expose them to many different boyfriends. This in no way means these children are somehow asking to be abused, it just means that sex offenders, like predators in the wild, prefer to attack those they believe to be weaker.

### **Here's what the experts recommend we teach our children about this topic:**

1. What kind of touching is appropriate and inappropriate
2. Say "No!" and get away fast if someone does or says something that makes the child feel uncomfortable
3. Help kids understand who a safe grownup is. Let them know who the trusted adults in their lives are. Remember, however, that many adults in "trusted" positions hurt children.
4. People who hurt kids often scare them by saying they will hurt their parents or other loved ones if they tell. Don't believe them. Kids can and should always tell a safe grownup if someone does something that hurts them or makes them feel uncomfortable.
5. Always let a trusted grownup know where they are going.
6. Kids should play and travel in groups. Being alone makes them more susceptible to being hurt.
7. Abductors often trick children into going with them quietly. Teach your kids that adults should ask for help from adults, not children. Abductors have tricked kids into going with them by offering candy, toys, saying that their puppy is lost, or asking the child if they want to see a baby animal or if they can give them directions. If an adult is asking for help, they should say "No!", and run away to tell a safe grownup.

8. Some abusers pay extra attention to one child, or give the child gifts for no reason in order to build trust with the child before they hurt them. Teach your child to tell you right away if someone gives them a gift or extra attention.

9. If the worst should happen, and an abductor is actually grabbing a child, they should fall on the ground, kick, scream, bite, and fight as hard and make as much noise as they can.

It's important to role play with your child. Practice dangerous situations with your child and show them how to say "No", how to run away, how to make a bunch of noise. Don't assume that once is enough. Take advantage of opportunities to discuss this issue with your kids regularly.

**Be aware that talking about these things can frighten your child.** Be sure to talk to them in a calm tone. Don't try to terrorize them into being safe, and be careful not to let your fear frighten them. Explain that like a fire or earthquake, these situations probably won't happen to them, but that they should be prepared just in case. Help them understand that worrying won't keep them safe, but knowing how to act will keep help protect them.

**Here are some great resources for talking with kids about this issue:**

Help your child take the Stranger Quiz at:

[http://pediatrics.about.com/od/parentingquizzes/1/bl\\_strngdngr.htm](http://pediatrics.about.com/od/parentingquizzes/1/bl_strngdngr.htm)

Age appropriate suggestions for talking with your child:

[http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/articles/stranger\\_danger.html](http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/articles/stranger_danger.html)

McGruff the Crime Dog's advice for Parents and Educators:

<http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/cgi-bin/extlink.pl?l=http://www.mcgruff.org/comic/7f1.htm>

Tips written for Kids:

<http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/cgi-bin/extlink.pl?l=http://www.mcgruff.org/comic/7f1.htm>

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