

Solutions

FAMILY
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NEWSLETTER

Issue 22

STREETPROOFING Your Child

Nothing is more important to parents than the security and safety of their children. To help protect their children from abduction and sexual abuse parents can “streetproof” children by teaching them a number of simple precautions to help safeguard them.

What families can do to keep kids safe

1. Teach your child his/her full name, address and phone number.
2. Make sure that your children know how to use the telephone and know your telephone number (including area code) and that they also know how to call the police in an emergency.
3. Always have children walk in pairs or groups and avoid isolated areas
4. Children should always travel the same way home.
5. Use a secret family code. Children should never go with anyone, not even a close family friend, unless this person is able to give the child the code. Once the code has been used, it should be changed.
6. Instruct children never to answer the door when home alone or to tell anyone over the phone that he or she is alone.
7. Tell your child it is not rude to ignore an adult who is asking directions on the street.
8. Explain to children that a stranger is *anyone* they do not know, and that they should never get into a car or walk anywhere with a stranger, unless given permission.
9. Instruct your children to report *any* suspicious people or incidents to you.
10. Do not display your child’s name on clothing, jewelry, lunchboxes etc. It could put a potential abductor on a first-name basis with your child
11. Don’t allow your young child to go to a public washroom unattended.

What your child should do if in danger

1. If someone physically holds your child, tell him or her to yell, kick and fight and to keep it up until the person lets go or help arrives.
2. Run - tell your child to put as much distance as possible between himself or herself and a problem.
3. Run directly to the **NEAREST** safe location e.g. Block Parent, neighbour, corner-store or police officer, and immediately tell an adult what happened.

* Permission to photocopy with credit given to Lisa Pridmore, Consultant, Family Service Canada.

NETPROOFING Your Child

In this digital age, parents do not only have to worry about sexual predators on the streets where their children play, but also on the message boards and chat rooms where they surf and chat.

Children and teenagers can benefit from being online, but they can also be targets of crime and exploitation. Cyberspace can be faceless. Online, a person that claims to be a 14-year-old girl could in fact be a 50-year-old man. Children need "street proofing" in this area as in other aspects of their lives. Teenagers are more at risk as they are more likely to be unsupervised.

What are the risks?

- Youth may be exposed to inappropriate material of a sexual or violent nature.
- They may provide information or arrange a meeting that could be dangerous.
- They may encounter messages that are harassing or demeaning.

Keeping your kids safe on the Net

- Like other activities your children are involved in, be aware of who their friends are and keep the lines of communication open.
- Keep your computer in an open space or family room which can facilitate supervision of what and where your kids are looking.

- Establish family rules. The first should be to never give out identifying information, e.g. home address or telephone number, school name, age, marital status or financial information.
- Never allow your child to meet face-to-face with another user without your permission and accompany your child to a public place if you do agree.
- Get to know what services your child is using, the information they are receiving and if material can be blocked.
- Report to your service provider any messages that are harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening.

Tackle the subject of sexual abuse prevention with the same honest, matter-of-fact manner you would attach to road safety. Remember that the only time a child will ask you about sexual abuse is after it has happened. Open the subject and your child will remember that you are approachable.

If you suspect that an abuse has taken place

- * **DO** encourage the child to talk about it.
- * **DO** establish in the child's mind that he/she is not to blame
- * **DO NOT** correct the child's story; listen to original words, even those that are babyish or family words.
- * **DO NOT** suggest or modify what the child is trying to say. Your ideas might confuse the truth.

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:

1-800-668-9920