

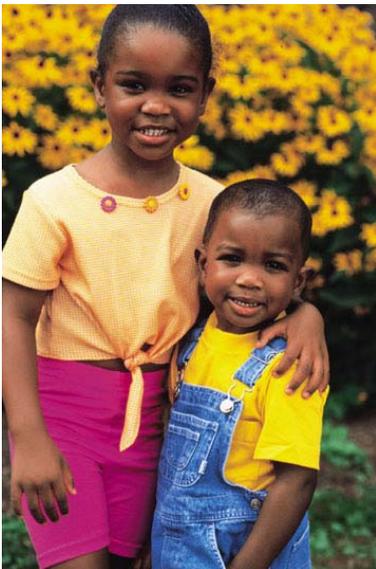


August 15, 2004

Safety on the Street

How to Protect Your Child When Traveling

By Teri Brown



Hannah Hayes, of Chicago, only lost her son at London's Heathrow Airport for a few minutes, but it seemed like a lifetime. "It terrified me," she says. "I always thought [of] an international airport as someplace where child snatchers would hang out."

Her son had been playing at a car racing vending machine, and suddenly he was gone. "There were so many people around," says Hayes. "He has bright red hair so he's hard to lose, but he was so little I couldn't see him in the crowd. I found him only a few feet away at another game, but I'll never forget that feeling." She now dresses her son in lime green or orange shirts when they travel.

Stranger Dangers

Neal Rawls, a veteran police officer, certified child protection investigator and author of *Be Alert, Be Aware, Have a Plan: The Complete Guide to Personal Security* (The Lyons Press, 2002), believes that being prepared for danger isn't paranoid, it's smart.

"The most important thing any parent can do is to talk to their children about safety," says Rawls. "In the year 2000, one out of every seven victims of sexual assault reported to the police was under the age of 6."

Parents should watch their kids and remember that predators prowl for unattended children, says Rawls. Crowds are even bigger at certain times of year, such as during the holidays, and parents are more easily distracted. Everyone wants their children to be polite, but parents have to make sure their kids will not easily comply with just any adult's orders. "It's a careful balance, but predators often look for children that are quiet or appear shy or lost," says Rawls. "Young people must be taught to cause a scene if they feel threatened."

Security, Separation and Shouting

If kids feel they are being abducted, teach them to sit down in the middle of the floor or grab the nearest person's leg and scream, "That's not my daddy" or "That's not my mommy!"

Point out security personnel and clerks to your children. Make sure they can recognize these people and know to go to them if they are lost. Have a meeting place for older children in case they become separated from you. One strategy is to write your cell phone number on your children's arms in case you lose each other.

Rawls says that when attending holiday functions, such as plays or other events, make sure to point out exits and escape routes to your children. An emergency can happen fast, and teaching your children to be observant and know how to react in an emergency may very well save their lives.



Separation can happen when you least expect it. Maintain physical contact with your child at all times. Children younger than 5 should be carried or placed in a stroller when in a large crowd. Safety harnesses are controversial, but mothers caring for several small children may want to use one when in a crowded airport or mall.

Crucial Communication

Knowing how to keep people safe is the business of SafePlace Corporation, an independent provider of safety accreditation of lodging, hospitals/health care offices, schools and other public areas. John C. Fannin, III, president and CEO of SafePlace Corporation, says preparation is key. "SafePlace criteria extend to all public facilities, and certain behaviors should be learned by adults and children," he says. "For instance, children should always know their name and how to spell it, know their address, phone number and the phone number of someone not living with them."



Fannin says parents should discuss several things with their children when entering public places. "Before entering a building, find a 'meeting place' at or just outside the entrance of the building," says Fannin. "When entering, look for exits immediately and show them to your children. Some exits may be in front of you and some in back. Use the closest exit."

Check for clear exit paths. If there are not at least two exits or the exit paths are blocked, parents should report the violation to management and leave the building if it is not immediately addressed. Then call the local fire marshal to register a complaint.

Safest Places

While staying at a hotel, Fannin suggests that you ask if the facility is SafePlace Accredited. SafePlace Accreditation is based primarily upon national codes, standards and recommended practices in the areas of fire protection, security and health and life safety. A hotel that has earned accreditation is concerned about providing an excellent standard of care to its guests.

"Upon entering the room, children should be instructed in how to respond in an emergency," says Fannin. "Show them how to dial the front desk in an emergency and teach them never to open the adjoining doors."

Safety Sites

To learn more about protecting your children from abduction and exploitation, visit these Web sites:

- [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#), Department of Justice
- [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children \(NCMEC\)](#)
- [The FBI's Crimes Against Children Program](#)
- [McGruff the Crime Dog](#)
- [SafePlace Corporation](#)