



**Marin County Sheriff's Office
Crime Prevention Unit
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 145
San Rafael, CA 94903**

Safety Tips for Children

Approximately 4,600 children are abducted by strangers each year in the U.S. Most of these children are sexually abused and traumatized by their abductors, but are soon returned alive to their parents. About 300 children suffer more permanent abductions. A few may be returned months or years later. Some are found murdered and some are never found. There are more than 114,000 attempted abductions each year. Children can be abducted from anywhere.

So what can you do? You can start by getting your child fingerprinted. The Marin County Sheriff's Office offers fingerprint kits free of charge; just contact our Crime Prevention Unit at (415) 499-7263.

The Marin County Sheriff's Office, through the Crime Prevention Unit, has deputies that go to the schools in the unincorporated areas of Marin County to talk to children about stranger and what to do if approached by one. You can also talk to your children about strangers. Here are some helpful tips to get you started.

Basics About Strangers

Who is considered a stranger? You should let your children know that anyone that they do not know is a stranger. This can include a neighbor they may wave to and say hello but do not really know. Never accept rides or go anywhere with a stranger. If someone tries to get them to go somewhere they should run and tell a trusted adult. This includes going for a walk with a stranger.

Do not accept gifts from a stranger. This could be money, candy, toys or anything that may be offered. Sometimes strangers use gifts as a way to get close to a child.

Beware of the "Nice Strangers". Sometimes a stranger will try to get close to a child by playing with them, or asking a child for help. Children should be told that an adult should be asking another adult or someone that they know for help or to play with. Beware of adults they don't know that want to play. Beware of "Lost pet". Do not put your child's name, so it can be seen, on clothing or items that are carried by your child. A stranger can use this to call your child by name and appear more familiar.

Teach your child what to do if someone tries to approach them. Also teach them what to do if someone were to grab them. Say NO! And run away. Go to a place where there is an adult that can help. Someplace they might go is:

- Their own house, if an adult is home that can help.
- Neighbor that they know. You should talk to them before hand to establish who these are.
- Sheriff / Police / Fire stations
- School. If there is someone at the school such as the principal, teachers, custodian etc.
- Stores. They should go to someone that works at the store for help.

Explain to them that if a stranger grabs them they need to get away. Most people trying to take a child do not want to attract attention. Your child should make a lot of noise to attract the attention of other people that can help. They should yell and scream as loud as they can. Explain to your child that in this situation they can also do some things that they are not ordinarily allowed to do such as hit, kick, and bite the person to get away. You can explain that this does not mean it is ok to hit, kick, or bite anyone they don't know, but only in certain circumstances.

Let your child know about good touching and bad touching. Explain to them that certain areas of their bodies are private. Adults should not touch you in places a bathing suit covers. (Exception being a doctor). Tell them that

touch is never to be kept secret and always tell their parents if someone touches them in a private area.

Use a codeword with your child. Strangers have been known to approach a child with an “emergency”, such as a parent being hurt. They will then tell the child that the parent told him or her to pick up the child. Your child should be told that you will try to never send someone that they don’t know to pick them up, but if you did need to do so have a codeword that only you and your child know. If for instance you needed someone that your child did not know pick him or her up the person would explain the situation and tell the child “your mom / dad told me to tell you the codeword is (and give the word)”. If your child is approached by any stranger that does not give the codeword, they should not go with them, but instead they should run and tell an adult that can help them.

One way that is commonly used to take a child is the “Lost Pet” story. The stranger will try to get a child to help them find a lost pet. The stranger may try to get the child to walk somewhere or get in the car and drive somewhere to find the “Lost pet”. Remind them that they should never go anywhere with a stranger.

Make sure your child knows that it is ok to tell you anything even if someone tells them that they will hurt the child if the child tells.

Practice with your child. Children love to do role-playing. Give your child some situations and let them practice. Talk to them often about the subject.

A great program that is available for teaching children these skills is the radKIDS program. For more information you can go to <http://www.radkids.org/>

If you have any question you can contact the Marin County Sheriff’s Office Crime Prevention Unit at 415-499-7263