

All About Strangers

3-4 Year Olds

Day 2 of 5

Objectives

To teach the first two rules children need to follow when they are by themselves or with their friends and they are approached by a stranger:

- Stay an arm's reach away.
- Don't talk to them.

To role-play the first two rules so the children begin to feel mastery of the skills.

Introduction for adult

Fear and anxiety about the possibility of abduction are as great a problem for children as the actual probability of abduction. The first two rules are designed to teach children to be alert when they're by themselves, to behave in a way that reduces their vulnerability to abuse or abduction by strangers, and to do so without fear or anxiety. The rules should be taught matter-of-factly, without fear and without stories about bad things that can happen.

You should be particularly aware of your child's responses. These always reflect their thinking, their beliefs and their concerns, and are the best clues to help you identify children who are excessively anxious or fearful about strangers. Children who try to change the subject, who suddenly don't want to participate, who begin to act out and become disruptive, may be letting you know they are uncomfortable with the discussion. Because there is nothing inherently frightening in the material, that child is telling you something about his/her own sense of well-being.

Remember, role-playing is acting out so children learn the skill, not just the concept. It should never be scary or alarming or create anxiety. Positive! Positive! Positive!

Concept vs. Action

There is an important difference between a concept, something children understand, which they have seen or heard, and a skill, something they can actually demonstrate. The personal safety skills presented in the videotape have minimal value to children as long as they remain concepts. Children must make the skills real in their own lives in order to use them effectively. This is similar to the difference between understanding how to ride a bicycle and actually being able to ride one.

The purpose of the role-playing is to make that transition. It takes the concepts you are teaching and turns them into direct and usable skills. The role-playing assures the children that they can actually do what they need to do. It is also your opportunity to confirm that your child has mastered the techniques.

The initial presentation of the rules will be made in the videotape. The subsequent discussion and role-playing give your child an opportunity to learn the techniques. As the videotape demonstrates, the role-playing should never be alarming or scary. Have a good time and use your natural acting ability to make the role-playing an enjoyable opportunity for everyone.

Introduction for children

Last time we talked about strangers and learned that:

- A stranger is just someone you don't know.
- There's no way to tell good strangers from bad strangers by how they look.
- When you're all by yourself, you have to take care of yourself.

Today we're going to learn the first two rules to follow with strangers.

Watch videotape

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHMc4cRZEQk&list=PLSrCYUKewj4fovjoOqyXkWnJ9mFR4Tcfo&index=10>

Role-play

Okay, when do we follow the two rules we just learned?

When you're by yourself or with your friends, or even when the grownup taking care of you isn't watching.

Rule #1 had a really long name. Do you remember it?

It's called the "Arm's Reach Rule." We can also call it the "Circle of Safety."

Demonstrate: the length of a grownup's arm plus how far they can reach, plus a little bit more. Also demonstrate the imaginary "Circle of Safety."

Reinforce and teach the rules to children by role-playing the following "What if..." games.

RP: What if you were sitting in your yard playing with (name a specific toy)? You're all by yourself and someone you don't know comes into the yard?

Have the children stand up and back up. If they crawl backward, instead of standing up, say "If you're sitting down, do you crawl like a crab or do you stand up and back up? That's right, you stand up and then back up."

Good, that's how far away I want you to stay away from strangers.

Reach out with your arm from time to time so they have a clear visual sense of how far an arm's reach away is.

Do I want you to do this because they're bad people?

No. You stay an arm's reach away because you don't know the person, and that's the first rule.

What if the person takes a step towards you?

What would you need to do to keep a circle of safety around yourself?

Again, you want children to back up and always stay an arm's reach away. This response should be automatic.

Did you back up because you were afraid?

No, it's just because that's the rule: Stay an arm's reach away.

RP: What if you are in the yard with one of your favorite toys? Do you leave your toys when you back up?

Yes, you do. That way you can look at the stranger without worrying about picking up your toys.

Where are your eyes?

Can you pay attention to the toys and the stranger at the same time?

No, so you need to look at the stranger.

If you're not looking, how will you know what the person is doing?

RP: What if the person says, "Hi, My name's _____, what's yours?"

Many times if you ask a question that requires a yes or no answer, children will use their bodies to answer without realizing that shaking their heads or pointing is just another way of answering. Demonstrate other ways of communicating such as shrugging, nodding and turning from side-to-side. The point is, when children are by themselves, they shouldn't talk with their words or with their bodies.

Do you answer?

RP: What if the person says, "Hi, is your mom home?" "Do you live here?"

"Is that your cat (dog, toy)?"

No matter what the stranger says, do you answer?

No, and that's Rule #2.

Is that rude?

Some people might think so, but in this situation, it is more important to be safe than to be polite. When your children are with you, you can work on social skills. Remember to change the role-plays as you go, substituting different toys and people until your child can stand up, back up and not talk automatically. Even if it takes more than today, take the time. It is a fundamental skill.

Next time, we'll learn another rule to follow with strangers when you are not with a grownup who is taking care of you.