

Safety Around Strangers

7-8-9 Year Olds

Day 1 of 3

Objectives

To clarify what a stranger is and what rules to follow in a wide variety of situations.

To establish that children can and must be responsible for themselves when they are by themselves.

To review the four basic rules children should follow with strangers when they are by themselves:

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

To review where and how to get help.

To enhance feelings of competence and to reduce fear and anxiety about strangers.

Introduction for adult

NOTE: There is a lot of material in the 3 sessions for this age group. Feel free to introduce it over a number of days. Follow your child's lead in terms of interest and understanding of how to apply the rules.

Children are quite aware of strangers, and are concerned about what they might do. They are eager to learn how to take care of themselves and are ready to have their questions and concerns answered.

Missing children have become a part of daily life. While statistics are inconsistent and no hard numbers yet exist that really define the magnitude of the problem, we know that some children are abducted and abused by strangers. Their pictures appear all around us. Children look at pictures of the missing and, quite naturally, wonder if it could happen to them. Unanswered, these questions can significantly undermine a child's ability to grow up feeling confident and secure.

Our intention in this program is to shift the emphasis from the negative to the positive, focusing on the child's ability to learn and use specific safety skills.

The Traditional Approach

In the past, we have taught children that there are good strangers and bad strangers. We have told them to watch out for bad strangers, often including a list of things that bad strangers might do, such as offering them candy, asking them to help find a lost dog, or asking to photograph them for a fashion job.

Children, thinking they know what we mean, are watching out for the bad strangers. This only increases their vulnerability because it makes it easy for someone who looks and acts nice to lure them into a seemingly innocent situation.

There is another equally important problem with this misunderstanding. This approach makes children afraid, and that fear limits their lives. When we say things to them like, "Don't ever get in a stranger's car because they might take you away and we'll never see you again," we create in their minds a new and frightening possibility. We make them feel small and weak, and we take away their ability to grow up feeling safe and cared for.

The Safe Child Program Approach

The Safe Child approach to teaching children to prevent abuse by strangers is a two-part process that addresses how children think and how they act. It requires preparing them to actually protect themselves while, at the same time, developing and enhancing their perception of their own well-being.

Children need to know who strangers really are. They need accurate information and specific guidelines that will limit their vulnerability, while maintaining their ability to move about freely, without fear or anxiety, in their everyday lives.

This program is designed to allow you to address both the real and imagined issues for children. It highlights and clarifies the typical misunderstandings children have about strangers. Misunderstandings which increase their risk, as it teaches new techniques for safety. It strengthens and focuses the child's sense of competency and control. It teaches children to think about the decisions they make, to act quickly and consistently in specific situations, to recognize when they need help and where to get it.

Children who have thought about their own safety with strangers, who understand what we want them to do, and who have practiced the techniques will be able to use the rules when they are needed without anxiety. They will not only feel safer, they will be safer!

Introduction for children

We're going to watch this video and then talk about strangers and some rules you should follow to help keep you safe.

Watch video

<https://www.youtube.com/watchv=tuFo4XmOMe4&list=PLSrCYUKewj4fovjoOqyXkWnJ9mFR4Tcfo&index=14>

Role-play

What's a stranger?

Can you tell by looking at someone if they are a nice person or not?

When you're all by yourself or with your friends, who's responsible for your safety?

Do you remember the first rule?

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

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

RP: What if someone comes into your yard and says, "Hi, I'm looking for the Smith house. Do you know where they live?" What would you say and do?

Stand up, back up so they are an arm's length away. Don't talk to the person.

RP: What if a stranger came up to you and said, "Hi, you don't know me, but I just moved in across the street. What's your name?" What would you say and do?

Stand up, back up so they are an arm's length away. Don't talk to the person.

RP: What if someone you don't know comes up to you and says, "Hi, I have a little boy just your age. Would you like to come over and play with him some afternoon?"

Stand up, back up so they are an arm's length away. Don't talk to the person. Maybe come in and ask a parent to come out and meet the new neighbors.

Do you remember Rule #2?

You don't talk to people you don't know when you are yourself or with your friends.

Is that rude? Some people might think so, but you're old enough to make some decisions for yourself now.

What's more important, being polite or being safe?

RP: What if the person knows your name and maybe my name? Does that matter?

No. If you don't know the person, follow the rules.

Next time we'll learn another rule to be safe around strangers when you are not with grownups who are responsible for you.

Note: The effectiveness of these rules for your child will depend on practice. Feel free to play the "What if..." game to assess their ability to actually apply the rules.