

# Family Keys

Self-Care Resources for Children & Their Families

## Interpersonal Safety

### 6 KEY

Every year, many children disappear, and many more are sexually abused. The thought of child abduction or abuse by a stranger is terrifying to parents.

Yet research indicates that in most cases of abduction or sexual abuse, the offender is not a stranger, but someone the child already knows. Children need to learn to protect themselves from both strangers and acquaintances in a variety of situations.

### Dangers from Strangers

Children need to be able to distinguish trusted friends from familiar strangers or total strangers.

A stranger is **anyone** — young or old — the child does not know well. Some — such as the clerk at the store — may seem familiar, while others are total strangers.

Most strangers are good people with good intentions, yet children must learn to follow some basic safety rules around people they do not know well.





### Parents can help:

1. Teach children they can be **polite, honest and helpful, while leaving the door closed.** Children tend to be too trusting, so they should never open the door to anyone who calls.
2. Practice the following two *Family Activities* to help your child(ren) feel safe at home or on the way home.

## Basic Safety Rules

### On the way home:

1. If you take a bus, plan your route for the safest bus stop.
2. Keep to main roads, avoiding shortcuts through deserted areas.
3. Walk with a friend, if possible.
4. Go straight home unless you have permission to do something else.
5. Keep a safe distance from any stranger in a car, on a bike or on foot — even if the person looks safe or asks for your help. Avoid riding an elevator alone with a stranger.
6. If you are being followed, look for a crowd to walk with. Cross the street or change direction, but never talk to the person following you. Find a busy place or safe adults — a store, gas station, Block Parent or Safe Home. Call your parents from there. Report what happened to the police.
7. **Never** go anywhere with anyone you do not know well.

### Many families use these rules:

1. First, check for any signs of a break-in — open doors or broken glass. If anything looks suspicious, don't go in — go to a safe neighbor's. An adult can check out your suspicions or call the police.
2. If the house looks normal, unlock the door, Take the key out of the door, and relock the door from inside.
3. Give an extra key to a neighbor home after school, in case you get locked out. **Never** hide keys outside. **Families in the country** with no neighbors nearby may need other plans.

### If the doorbell rings when you are home alone:

1. **Never** open the door.
2. Identify who is at the door. Look out the viewer, if possible. Some families choose not to have children answer the door if they cannot see who is outside.
3. Never let a visitor know you are alone. Don't give information about other family members' schedules, either. If a visitor asks for help, direct him or her to an adult nearby.



## Personal Safety Role Play

Children are often given very easy situations in which the “stranger” gives up immediately when the child gives the correct response. In real life, this is seldom the case. As you work through the following example, you will see most children have difficulty knowing what to do if the stranger persists.

### Situation

1. A middle-aged woman rings the doorbell.
2. *“Hello. My name is Mrs. Bell. I’m supposed to leave a package for your mother.”*
3. *“Couldn’t I give the package to you? I hate to leave it out here.”*
4. *“Well, I don’t want to leave it next door, and I don’t want to make another trip. Let me talk to your mother.”*

### Recommended response

1. *“Yes?”*  
Keep the door closed and locked.
2. *“My mother can’t come to the door right now. If you leave the package outside, I’ll see that she gets it.”*
3. *“No. But you could leave it next door if you want. Or I can have my mother call you to set up another time.”*
4. Call a neighbor or parent.  
You can no longer handle the situation alone.



## What do you do?

**R**ead each situation and discuss what to do to be sure you would be safe.



1. As you are walking home, a man in a car stops and calls to you:

*"Excuse me, can you tell me where Main Street is?"*

2. You are playing at the park. A woman comes up to you and asks:

*"Excuse me, have you seen a little white dog? She ran away a few minutes ago, and I can't find her."*

3. A man comes up to you on the playground. He shows you a badge, and says:

*"Your dad got sick at work. He asked me to get you and take you home."*

Parents can help:

### What about trusted adults?

Sadly, most child abuse comes not from strangers, but from people the child knows. Children can be abused by relatives, family friends, and even older brothers or sisters.

Should parents teach children to be wary of these people? Of course not. Young children need to trust the important adults in their lives. They may be harmed emotionally if we make them afraid of their everyday surroundings and people. Here are some ways to help:

1. **Teach children to recognize** when something or someone is making them feel uncomfortable, and to understand that nobody has the right to make them "keep secrets."
2. **Teach children to always tell** a trusted adult if something or someone is ever making them feel uncomfortable. If that first person they tell does not seem to understand, they should find another adult to tell.
3. **Listen carefully** to what children tell you, and let them know that you understand how they feel.



## What do you do?

**G**ather the whole family for this activity. Have different family members take turns playing different roles.

### Here is the setting for this role play:

You are by yourself after school, doing your homework. Two of your best friends stop by and tell you they are on their way to the video arcade at the shopping mall. They want you to come with them. They have money, and say they'll even give you some to spend. The problem is, your mom said you were **not** supposed to go to the mall after school when she was not home.

Have family members playing the "friends" use as many ways as they can to try to convince the person playing "you" to come with them. They can use threats, bribes or whatever they think will work. See how hard they can make it to resist?

Have the person playing "you" try to refuse them in a way that still lets you stay friends.

#### Recommended strategies:

1. Suggest other things you can all three do at your house, instead of going to the mall.
2. Let your friends know you need to follow your "house" rules to get other privileges that you **really** want to have, so breaking the rules is not worth it to you.

Parents can help:

### What about pressure from friends?

Most children want to be liked by other children their own age or older.

Sometimes, this desire for approval becomes so strong that children will do things they know are wrong — such as shoplifting "on a dare," or trying a cigarette just to make or keep friends. In many areas, organized gangs exist, and these may be actively recruiting new members from younger grades.

Children may feel a great deal of pressure to join in what other children are doing, even if they know they shouldn't. Parents can help children resist peer pressure:

1. **Talk with your child(ren)** about the things you believe are right and wrong.
2. **Teach your child(ren) HOW to refuse friends.**  
For example, look the friend directly in the eye, saying something like:  
*"No, I don't do that. Let's \_\_\_\_\_ instead."*  
Practice **how** to resist pressure from friends.
3. **Get to know your child's friends**, and the kinds of activities your child does with friends.
4. **Let your child know you understand** that pressure from friends can be hard to resist, but that you also have confidence in your child's good judgment.

**6**

**KEY**

**Interpersonal Safety** reminds children that while most

people are safe and well-meaning, it is important to act safely around adults they do not know very well. It is better to inconvenience a safe adult than to fall prey to a very convincing adult who may harm a child. *Key 6* also helps children know what to do when people they do know are being coercive or abusive.



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