



CHILD AWARENESS

Helping to Street Proof Your Child

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Helping to Street Proof Your Child

For:

Parents/Guardians

Goals:

- 1) Your responsibility as a parent
- 2) How young can you start street proofing
- 3) Teaching road safety
- 4) Importance of traffic safety
- 5) Learning your neighbourhood
- 6) Knowing their friends
- 7) Recognizing safe spots
- 8) Knowing where your children are
- 9) Having an information center
- 10) Learning how to use their map
- 11) Child identification
- 12) Identifying strangers
- 13) Rules your children need to know
- 14) Teaching self defense
- 15) How to deal with an emergency
- 16) Safety in public washrooms
- 17) Safety in public transportation
- 18) Safety in movie theatres
- 19) Dangers of hitch hiking
- 20) Cautions when babysitting

Child Awareness

1) Introduction:

It is important to point out to parents that there are no absolute guarantees that nothing will happen to a child regardless of what is read or practiced but, the following suggestions can greatly reduce the potential risk to any child.

2) Responsibilities:

The responsibilities of your police service is to protect and assist the general public but it is the parents that have the most important responsibility for the safety and security of their children by:

- a) Making them aware of potential dangers.
- b) To instruct them in procedures to help them recognize and avoid harmful and hazardous situations.
- c) Make the children feel comfortable in reporting any incident of potential danger.

This procedure is known as street proofing your children.

Street proofing means the ability of a child to recognize a danger or potential danger and to take some appropriate action to avoid it. It includes protection not only against criminal activity but against personal injury as well.

It's up to the parents and responsible adults to instill this awareness in their children through instruction and example.

While teaching the child of possible dangers, we must remember to do it in such a way as not to frighten the child or instill fear and paranoia of the outside world.

Make it fun to learn. Use games, practice runs, test and always praise their knowledge.

3) How old must the child be?

A parent should start street proofing their child as soon as they are old enough to understand what you are saying.

4) **Road Safety:**

Start teaching the child road sense while he or she is still in a stroller.

Turn it into a useful game by teaching them the colors of traffic lights and the meaning of the different colors. A little song is very useful:

i.e. Three little traffic lights
 All standing in a row
 Red means stop
 And green means go
 The yellow one there
 Says wait a little bit
 Cause if you cross with me
 You might get hit

You can ask the child some questions:

- a) Do you think it is safe to cross?
- b) Do you think the car is far enough for us to cross safely?

By involving the child this way, you are developing your child's perception of speed, distance and danger.

5) **Traffic Safety:**

More children are killed as a result of traffic accidents than any other cause of death.

It is essential for your child's welfare that he or she learns about traffic rules. Many children do not observe the rules. Some actually play daredevil games on streets. We must point out to them that they are not INVINCIBLE and one mistake can cost them their lives.

One thing that parents can do is to follow your children. Whether they are on foot or on a bike, you should take a few minutes to see how they behave on their own and if they are obeying the safety rules.

This action might put your fears to rest, especially if your child is observing the rules but, your child might surprise you. If you discover your child has not been observing the rules, then it's time to apply disciplinary measures. For example:

- take their bike way for a certain period of time

-explain to them that since they don't take their safety seriously that you are forced to do it for them. Restrict them to their yard until they importance of their safety is firmly instilled in their minds.

Children need to know the logic behind the rules:

“Because I said so” might have been reason enough years ago but its not enough for our children today.

“Why” is our children's favorite question and as parents we must be prepared to answer with logic and not fairy tales.

6) Neighborhood:

Your next step is to know your neighborhood. The secret is to know it through your child's eyes.

Ask your child to walk around his or her neighborhood. Ask them to show you their favorite place to play, friend's houses.

This will give you an excellent opportunity to point out several things:

- off limits places
 - trails or lane ways
 - construction sites
 - railway tracks
 - wooded lots
- or any other secluded spots where your child can be dragged into unnoticed.

7) Knowing their Friends:

- Get to know their friends
- Be aware of what type of influence that friend has on your child
- Encourage your child to stay away from friends who are much older
- Get to know the parents of that friend to learn their standards and rules.
- Don't allow your child on a sleep over or just a visit in someone else's home unless you know and approve of that home

Once your child has a circle of friends encourage your child to use the **BUDDY SYSTEM**.

There is always safety in numbers and everyone should use the buddy system. Whether your child is going to the park or to a friends' home, encourage your child to never go alone. He or she should go with a buddy. When walking to a friend's house, the child should ask their friend to meet him or her half way.

Always avoid taking trails in bushy area or short cuts through lane ways. When going somewhere, stick to the main roads even though it might take you a little longer.

8) Safe Spots:

When walking through the neighborhood, you could point out safe spots to your children.

- i.e. – friends' houses
- Confectioneries

Explain to them that these spots can provide refuge to anyone needing help.

Once you familiarize yourself with your neighborhood, you would have no problem searching for your child should he or she is late for some reason.

9) Knowing Where They Are:

The next step is to have your child understand that it is important to always let someone know where he or she is going. This is called the 3W process:

- Where you are
- Who you are with
- When you expect to be back

The best way to train the children in letting us know where they are is by showing them the example. Before you go out let the child know where you are going, when you will be back and who you're going with. The child should automatically fall into the same routine.

10) **Info Center:**

In any home an information center is essential. A bulletin board should display all VIP numbers such as 911, Police info number, work numbers (in case help is needed right away) Poison Control, relatives.

One project your children might enjoy doing is the “This is my neighborhood” map. The child can design it themselves and have fun in the process. It should include all the places they normally enjoy going to and it should also include friend’s names, addresses, and telephone numbers.

Once completed, place this map in a prominent place in the house. This will prove its importance to the child and encourage the child to use the map every day.

11) **How To Use Their Map:**

Paste the map on piece of cardboard. Then all the child needs to do is place an ordinary thumb tac on top of the place where they are headed. Using the clock, the child can pencil in expected time of arrival, and time they have left. Explain to the child how important it is to you that they use the map. You would always know at a glance where he or she is. In case of change of plans, the child should:

- a) return home and correct map
- b) call home and let someone know of change of plans.

This map is extremely useful to **latchkey kids**; children that baby sit themselves for short periods of time.

12) **Identification:**

Children should always carry identification with them.

In addition to their names and addresses, there should be at least two other numbers of people to contact. Other information such as allergies or other medical problems is vital if the child becomes lost or injured.

Never put ID nametags on stickers on outer clothing or school bags/lunch boxes. Include clothing, lunch boxes, plastic cards on a shoelace that can be slipped inside a jacket is much better.

13) **Strangers and Missing Children:**

Strangers and missing children have always been terrifying topics for a parent. How can we tell our children to stay away from strangers without instilling fear in them?

We want our children to be assertive with their rights. We would not achieve this goal by frightening them.

We often remind our children of the important stranger rule but we forget the most important part... "What a stranger is?"

a) Explain to your child that a stranger is simply someone you don't know.

One method of preventing a child from getting a distorted idea of who a stranger is can be done by eliminating the word stranger from the conversation. Instead use "a person you don't know too well." That takes care of someone completely unknown to the child and it also includes acquaintances.

Again communication between you and the child is important. Ask the child what he or she thinks a stranger looks like and eliminate any myths the child might have.

b) **Some Myths:**

- a stranger is a BAD person
- a stranger is a BAD man who dresses in black
- a stranger is someone who kidnaps and kills children
- a stranger is only a man, never women or children
- A neighbor or someone you've seen before is not a stranger

It is very important to have the child understand that a stranger is a person you don't know or don't know too well.

c) **Discuss Feelings:**

- Discuss the types of feelings you have when you are with someone you know very well (parent, sibling, friend). Then discuss the feelings you have when you're with someone you don't know too well or not at all. Talk about the differences between these two groups of people:

Go over the following rules:

- Never accept anything from a person you don't know well.
- Never go anywhere with a person you don't know too well.
- Never talk to a person you don't know too well.
- Never run errands for a person you don't know too well.
- Never go into someone's house, even someone you know a little without checking with someone at home first.
- Never go near cars belong to people you don't know too well.

Stress the importance of following these rules even though the person looks really nice. Explain that no one can tell if someone is good or bad just by looking at them. It is better to be safe than sorry.

- d) Once these rules have been established, you can play “pretend games” with your children to run scenarios by them. Remember praise and encouragement will help your child become more assertive. Reproaching them for the wrong answer will cause them to be timid and frightful.
- e) Pay attention to what your child is telling you. Talk to them about their day, and what they did. Pay attention to what your child brings home and inquire discreetly on how they acquired the article(s).
- f) When your child leaves the house, pay attention to what they are wearing. It is amazing how many parents are not able to supply this information to investigating officers (should the child go missing). When the child is small it's easier to remember since we dress them, however, as they get older we do not pay enough attention to what they are wearing.

14) Teaching Self Defense:

The time has come to prepare our children for self-defense. Always remember that the **BEST DEFENSE IS COMMON SENSE**.

The best common sense rule is to think before you act. Once you are in a situation, get out quickly if you start feeling uncomfortable.

The child should be taught to **SAY NO AND GO TELL**. When saying NO they must do it in an assertive manner. Sometimes when the child is frightened,

saying NO loudly can be difficult. The child may freeze when frightened. That's when saying NO with our bodies plays an important role.

Here's a little exercise you can do with your child to prove how effective a "body NO" is.

Have the child stand straight, hands tightly at his or her side, head straight ahead and instruct the child to say NO as loudly as he or she can without moving a muscle.

After this instruct the child to say NO again but this time using his or her body by using their arm, stamping their feet, and using all their energy. Talk about the difference and how much louder the body NO is. The body NO however serves another purpose. It unlocks the child from a frozen position and launches them into action. Tell the child to run away.

Instruct them that whenever they have a feeling that something's not right, they are right and the best thing to do is:

Say NO then go and tell

Even if they have mixed feelings about a certain person or incident, it's best to say NO then go and tell.

15) Where Do They Go?

We must teach our children where to go in certain situations:

- If they are in the neighborhood, they could go to a safe house (a house you're pointed out to them on your neighborhood walk) a corner store, or the closest available house (in extreme emergencies).

When shopping, pre-arrange a meeting place if you should become separated.

- Instruct children to go to a cashier, large display, information booth, or to go to a mother with very small children (case studies show that children feel more comfortable doing this).

16) While In Public Washrooms:

Go with them. It is an unfortunate fact that many public washrooms have become meeting places for unsavory characters.

Take them to the washroom with you when they are young. However, once they are older and need to go on their own, call loudly into the washroom as the child enters saying, "I'll be waiting right here, don't be too long."

17) Public Transportation:

Tell your child, that when travelling on a bus to sit as close to the driver or next to other children. Children must understand that just because they are getting older does not mean that things are safer. Again travel with a buddy if at all possible.

18) Movie Theaters:

Instruct your children to get up and change seats if an adult sits next you them when there are plenty of other seats that adult could have chosen.

If adult makes advances they should yell or scream. Make a scene. It's better to be embarrassed then molested.

19) Hitchhiking:

Teach your child never to hitch hike!

Advise them that if they are stranded, to call home and you will pick them up, or have someone pick them up, or send a taxi.

Be honest with them. Explain to them that *yes* you might be upset about going in -30 degree weather to pick them up, but that anger will pass and as a parent you'll never let them down. Explain that if missing the bus happens to frequently that other more drastic measures might have to be taken. If they are not responsible enough to notice the time they are not responsible enough to go out.

Hitchhiking might seem like a plausible answer to a teenager's problem but they should be reminded of this: "You never know who's behind the wheel."

Some teenagers however are still not convinced. The following will help reduce risks.

- Stay away from drivers who appear to be drinking, tired, or on drugs.
- Never get into the rear seat of a two-door vehicle. (do not cut off your exit)
- Be aware of vans.
- Never sit between two people. Your access to the door and window is cut off.
- Follow your instincts. If something tells you that you shouldn't get into this particular car do not get in. It might be better to wait for the next ride.

20) Babysitting:

A child should never baby sit for someone they are not acquainted with. Ask for the references who referred him or her for the job, tell them to call the person who made the referral, and get information as to who these people are.

Instruct your child never to accept a ride home from someone who's been drinking. Again tell your child to call you and you will make arrangements to pick her or him up or speak to the people your child is babysitting for about a taxi.

21) Conclusion:

By being an approachable parent and discussing various topics with your child, you will help greatly with street proofing your child.

Many parents are concerned that they do not spend enough time with their children because of their careers. Remember quality surpasses quantity.

By monitoring a loving and open relationship, it will insure the well being of both parent and child.