

Information about the differences between strangers kids should look out for and for those they can trust.

Kids see strangers every day out in public; in stores, at the park, and in their neighborhoods. Most of these strangers are nice, normal people. But, a few may not be. Parents can protect their children from dangerous strangers by teaching them about suspicious behavior and by taking a few precautions of their own.

WHO IS A STRANGER?

A stranger is anyone that your family doesn't know. It is common for children to think that "bad strangers" look scary, like villains in cartoons. This is not only not true, but dangerous for children to think this way. "Pretty strangers" can be just as dangerous as the not-so-pretty ones. When you talk to your child(ren) about strangers, explain that no one can tell if strangers are nice or not just by looking at them.

Don't make it seem like all strangers are bad. If children need help — whether they're lost, being threatened

by a bully, or being followed by a stranger—the safest thing for them to do in many cases is ask a stranger for help. You can make this easier for them by showing them which strangers are okay to trust.

WHO ARE SAFE STRANGERS?

Safe strangers are people children can ask for help when they need it. Teachers, principals, and librarians are adults children can trust and are easy to recognize when at work. Public Safety personnel, like police and firefighters, are also easily recognizable as safe strangers. Make sure you emphasize that whenever possible, children should go to a public place to ask for help.

You can help your children recognize safe strangers by pointing them out when you're out in public. Also, show your children places they can go if they need help, like local stores and restaurants, or homes of family or friends in your neighborhood.

RECOGNIZING AND HANDLING DANGEROUS SITUATIONS

Perhaps the most important way parents can protect their children is to teach them to be wary of potentially dangerous situations. This will help them when dealing with strangers, as well as known adults who may not have good intentions. Help children recognize the warning signs of suspicious behavior, such as when an adult asks them

to disobey their parents or do something without permission, to keep a secret, or makes them feel uncomfortable in any way. Also, tell your children that an adult should never ask a child for help, and if one does ask for their help, teach them to find a trusted adult right away to tell what happened.

You should also talk to your children about how they should handle dangerous situations. One way is to teach them "No, Go, Yell, Tell." If in a dangerous situation, kids should say no, run away, yell as loud as they can, and tell a trusted adult what happened right away. Make sure that your children know it is okay to say no to an adult in a dangerous situation and to yell to keep themselves safe, even if they're indoors. It's good to practice this in different situations so that your children will feel confident in knowing what to do. Here are a few possible scenarios:

- A nice-looking stranger approaches your child in the park and asks for help finding their dog.
- A woman who lives in your neighborhood, but doesn't know your child invites them for a snack.
- A stranger ask your child for a ride home.
- Your child thinks they're being followed.

WHAT ELSE CAN PARENTS DO?

In addition to teaching children how to recognize and handle dangerous situations and strangers, there are a few more things parents can do to help their children stay safe and avoid dangerous situations.

- **Know where your children are at all times.** Make it a rule that your children must ask permission or check in with you before going anywhere. Give your children your work and cell phone numbers so they can reach you at all times.
- **Point out safe places.** Show your children safe places to play, safe roads and paths to take, and safe places to go if there's trouble.
- **Teach children to trust their instincts.** Explain that if they ever feel scared or uncomfortable, they should get away as fast as they can and tell an adult. Tell them that sometimes adults they know may make them feel uncomfortable, and they should still get away as fast as possible and tell another adult what happened. Reassure children that you will help them when they need it.
- **Teach your children to be assertive.** Make sure they know that it's ok to say no to an adult and to run away from adults in dangerous situations.
- **Encourage your children to play with others.** There is safety in numbers!
- **Monitor your child's online activities.** Adults can pose as children when playing video games.
- **Be present.** It is important to know who and where your children hang out with and at.



DO YOUR PART TO MAKE OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFER

We count on our community members to be our "eyes and ears." Report ANY suspicious activity to SMPD right away via 911, or (650)522-7700. You may also contact us anonymously by voicemail at (650)522-7676 or text message to (650)262-3473.

JOIN NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

If a Neighborhood Watch does not exist on your block, you can start one with help from SMPD. For additional information about the City of San Mateo Neighborhood Watch Program, call us at (650)522-7791 or email us at neighborhoodwatch@cityofsanmateo.org.

CITY OF SAN MATEO

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