UNITED
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

Keeping Kids Safe

(Without Stress)

The world is changing all the time, and each day means new things to watch out for when parents consider how to keep their children safe. You can't be with them every moment of every day. Even if you wanted to, that's not the most effective way to keep them safe.

So what is? Hire a full-time nanny? A bodyguard? Buy them body armor?

No. But teaching them to make good decisions and to be responsible is. That way, even when you can't be there to watch out for your children, they'll be watching out for themselves.

Choose opportunities to reinforce safety skills. Teachable moments go a long way toward furthering children's understanding of issues. If an incident occurs in your community and your child asks you about it, speak frankly but reassuringly.

You don't need to frighten children to get your point across. Fear can actually work against you. Instead, speak calmly and conversationally. Spend time encouraging and answering questions, and give examples that clarify what you want to express.

When talking to children keep your messages and comments concrete and simple. Be more concrete and straight forward with younger children. Children "tune out" to lectures — especially long ones. Children often will nod and make you think that they understand what you are saying, leading you to believe that they fully understand the point you are trying to make. Ask them questions to "test" their comprehension to see if they understood what you told them.

Upcoming Articles

June 2007
Depression in Men

July 2007
Managing Anger

Tips For Children

Make sure your children know who they can trust. Come up with a list of trusted adults they can turn to if you're not around, including teachers or friends' parents. Then, come with up locations they can go to if they're in trouble and you're not around — this is especially important if they walk home from school or from a bus stop.

Make sure they know important phone numbers, and how to dial them. Talk with them about what situations might arise that they might need to ask for help to deal with. Make sure they know it's OK to ask for help, and that it's better to be safe than sorry. Other things to tell your children include:

• Don't go anywhere, accept anything, or get into a car with anyone before first checking with a parent, guardian or trusted adult.
• Don't go out alone. Take a friend with you, even when playing outside.
• Say no if someone tries to touch you. Say no if someone treats you in a way that makes you scared, uncomfortable, or confused. Run away from them, and call your parents as quickly as possible.
• Tell a parent, guardian, or trusted adult if you feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
• There will always be someone to help you.

The following tips can help when speaking to your children about the dangers facing them in the world:

- Speak openly about safety issues to your children. They'll be less likely to come to you if the issue seems mysterious or shrouded in secrecy. If they know you're comfortable discussing it, they're more likely to be comfortable discussing it.

- Practice what you talk about. You may think your children understand your message, but until they can incorporate it into their daily lives it may not be clearly understood. Find opportunities to practice "what if" scenarios.

- Despite a very visible "Stranger Danger" message, children don't have the same understanding of who a stranger is that adults do. Danger to children is greater in many cases from someone familiar to you or to them than from a stranger. Don't muddle the message with stranger talk.

- Teach children it is more important to get out of a threatening situation than it is to be polite. Tell them it's OK to tell you what happened, and that it's not the same as being a "tattletale." Show them you won't be angry.

Don't forget about your older children. Children ages 11 to17 are not immune to risk; at those ages, you're beginning to give them more freedom. Make sure they understand important safety rules as well.∎

Safety Online

In today's world, threats come from all different places. Kids and teens now face danger online, where predators can easily pretend to be someone they're not. For many adults who grew up in a pre-Internet world, keeping abreast of the dangers it presents can be challenging.

Here are some tips from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to pass on to your children about keeping themselves safe online:

- Don't give out personal information about yourself, your family situation, your school, your telephone number, or your address.

- Tell your parents right away if you come across something that makes you feel uncomfortable.

- Don't ever agree to get together with someone you "meet" online without first checking with your parents. If they agree to the meeting, bring one of them along.

- Never send a person your picture or anything else without first checking with your parents.

- Don't respond to messages that are mean or in any way make you feel uncomfortable. Tell your parents right away so they can contact the online service.

Parents should set up rules for their children to go online. Establish times of day, the length of time they can be online, and what sites they can and can't visit.∎

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