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## **Safe From Strangers**

**By Gary Direnfeld**

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There are few thoughts as terrifying as the abduction of your young child by a stranger. The fear causes parents to think long and hard about their children's safety. They tell them in a very clear voice, "Do not to talk to strangers."

The problem is though, that a child's view of a stranger is very different from a parent's view. From the child's perspective, because a stranger is someone they are supposed to be afraid of, they expect a stranger to look ugly or scary. In fact, few, if any strangers actually look like the child's notion. Then to make matters more confusing for children, we teach them to respect and listen to their elders and be polite. Then as role models, children see us talk to people we have never met before, day in and day out.

So young children get it and will not to talk to strangers. They will very willingly avoid scary looking people. However, when confronted by a friendly, kind looking older person, they will likely respond politely, which in most cases means "speaking when spoken to" and as they are taught in school, they will follow their directions.

Helping young children not to talk to strangers or not go with them, takes much more than the simple admonishment, "Don't talk to strangers."

Parents who want to increase the likelihood that their child will avoid or leave from persons unknown must spend a good amount of time talking about the issue and teaching their children on an ongoing basis. These tips may help:

When out in the community, in a matter of fact voice, point out the various people and ask your child if s/he knows them. Use this as an opportunity to explain that a stranger is any person we do not know, regardless of what they look like.

Next it becomes very important to differentiate the rules for grown-ups and the rules for children. Sometimes simply phasing it as, "Are you old enough to talk to people you don't know by yourself?"

and then explain that they must have your permission to do so.

In the event a stranger approaches a child, they then must be equipped with strategies to manage the situation. Some parents provide a "code word." Explain to the child if someone doesn't know the code word, they do not have permission to go or talk with the person. In such situations, the child must be instructed to leave the person and immediately go to another adult they know, or older child if an adult is not available. It is important to also teach the child that this is not rude. The child must understand that they have your full permission to leave the situation and to do so immediately.

Managing your child's safety, in your absence is truly a scary thought for most parents. We do not want to put undue fear in our children, but we do want to keep them from harm. It is important to understand how our own behaviour may contradict what we want children to do when approached by people they do not know. We have to talk about the difference between what parents may do and what children may do. Only parents may touch the stove... only parents talk to strangers.

Finally, in addition to teaching who NOT to talk to, we must also teach, who they CAN talk to. If for instance, your child is lost in the store, who can they talk to? Develop a list of safe persons your child can talk to – even if they do not know them. The list may include police, fireman, teachers and even cashiers in stores. Remember keeping children safe is an ongoing discussion and not a simple one-time set of rules.

Keep talking with them to keep them safe.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker and expert on matters of family life. He is in private practice, writes and provides workshops and is the developer of the "I Promise Program" – teen safe driving initiative. Search his name on GOOGLE.COM to view his many articles. Feel free to call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Courts in Ontario consider Gary an expert on child development, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations and social work.

Buy the book: To order Direnfeld's book, Raising Kids Without Raising Cane, send a cheque or money order in the amount of \$12.00 to: Interaction Consultants, 20 Suter Crescent, Dundas, Ontario, Canada L9H 6R5

Parents of new teen drivers are encouraged to check out this teen safe driving program:

[www.ipromiseprogram.com](http://www.ipromiseprogram.com)

<http://www.ipromiseprogram.com/gary/direnfeld.htm>

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker and expert on matters of family life. He is in private practice, writes and provides workshops and is the developer of the "I Promise Program" – teen safe driving initiative. Search his name on GOOGLE.COM to view his many articles. Feel free to call him for your next

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Protect Your Child. Good Things That Are Bad.

By Ralph Winn

"Don't talk to strangers!" It's a common phrase parents use to educate their kids, but it doesn't always work in the right way. A popular story made headlines across America a few summers ago when an 11-year-old boy was lost in the Utah wilderness for four days. During that time, he stayed on the trail. He saw people searching for him but deliberately hid from them, afraid someone might "steal" him. He was eventually found, but his interpretation of his parents' rule about strangers kept him in danger longer than necessary. That little boy listened to his parents, which was good. However, he didn't really understand what they meant, which was bad.

Good things that are bad:

Kids want to be helpful. Strangers often ask children for help with something so they can be led away or snatched. Your child is very likely to cooperate because children seek validation.

Kids are trusting. Most children put all the people in the world into two groups: good guys and bad guys. Unfortunately, they can rarely tell who goes into which group because strangers who want to hurt them don't always look like "bad guys." Kids don't know that any stranger, no matter what they look like, could potentially hurt them.

Kids don't want to make a fuss. Many children have been taught how to behave in public: no screaming, no tantrums, and no fighting. When a stranger tries to abduct your child, your child might not want to make a fuss for fear of misbehaving and getting in trouble.

Kids want to follow your rules. You teach your children to beware of strangers, but you'd be surprised how few kids actually know who counts as a stranger. You don't want your child to avoid policemen or doctors because they consider them strangers so it's important they know the difference between good strangers and bad strangers.

You have a lot to worry about when it comes to protecting your child from strangers. Luckily there are some simple things you can do to keep them safe when you aren't around.

Tips for parents

- 1) Talk to your child about the dangers involved in dealing with strangers.
- 2) Listen to your child when they try to tell you something is wrong.
- 3) Teach your child the basics. Your child should know his phone number, address, and whom to ask for help.
- 4) Make rules about where and when your kids can play.
- 5) Get specific. Make sure your kid knows who counts as a stranger.

Nothing replaces your supervision of your child. It's your job to take care of your child, but you can't be with them all the time. When you aren't there your child must know what to do to stay safe from strangers. If you educate your children on dealing with strangers without scaring them, you can feel more confident about their safety.

Ralph Winn has over 32 years of education and experience in the security industry  
<http://www.homesecuritystore.com>

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