

FAMILY RULES FOR PARENTS

Establishing a system of "family rules" about personal safety can be a good way to teach children to distinguish between safe and non-safe situations. Many families already have rules about bedtime, TV-watching, chores, etc. By adopting rules about personal safety, parents can teach good habits through reinforcement and repetition without generating excessive fear. The following are suggestions for personal safety rules that can be incorporated into a family routine.

- Kids should be taught not to go anywhere with anyone without parental permission. This includes getting permission a second time if plans change and calling to check before going from one friend's home to another location.
- **Know where and with whom your children are at all times.** Remind children never to take **anything** or respond in **any way** if approached by someone they don't know. Teach them to run away as quickly as they can to you or a trusted adult.
- **Never leave your children alone or let your children go places alone,** and always supervise your young children or make sure there is a trusted adult present to supervise them if you cannot. Make sure your older children always **take a friend** when they go somewhere. Never leave a child alone in a public place.
- Remind children to **never** hitchhike, approach a car or engage in a conversation with anyone within a car that they do not know and trust.
- Learn the full names of your kids, friends, their parents, names, addresses, and phone numbers. Check to verify the accuracy if you get the information from your kids. When your child is at a friend's home, who else is present? Parents? Older kids? Neighbors? No one?
- Know your child's routes to and from school, play and errands. Insist they stick to the same route—no shortcuts! If you have to look for them, you will know where to begin.
- Establish and point out safe havens such as cashiers in stores, fire stations, store security officers and other places children can go if they need assistance or feel threatened.
- Teach your child how to dial 911 and explain their emergency. If using a pay phone under pursuit, or if detained in a stranger's home...teach your child not to hang up the phone.
- **Have a list of family members who could be contacted in case of an emergency.** Designate a family member or close associate who would be able to fill the role of advisor in case of an emergency.



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- Never leave children unattended in an automobile, whether it is running or not. Children should never be left unsupervised or allowed to spend time alone or with others in automobiles, as the potential dangers to their safety outweigh any perceived convenience or “fun.”
- Avoid Clothing and toys with your child’s name on it. A child is less likely to fear someone who knows his/her name. (Mark your child’s initials on an inside tag instead.)
- Interact regularly with your neighbors. Tell your children whose homes they are allowed to visit.
- Make a list with your children of their neighborhood boundaries, choosing significant landmarks.
- Walk the route to and from school with your children, pointing out landmarks and safe places to go if they’re being followed or need help. Make a map with your children showing acceptable routes to school, using main roads and avoiding shortcuts or isolated areas. If your children take a bus, visit the bus stop with them and make sure they know which bus to take.
- Teach kids alternatives: if they are bothered or followed on the playground, walking to friend's home, school or store; where do they go? Walk these common routes with your child and look for choices. Can they go back into the school, in a store or business (kids are reluctant to enter a strange store or business unless you give them permission), into a fire station or approach someone doing yard work?
- **Take steps to secure personal information about yourself.** Consider getting a post office box and registering everything you can there including your vehicles and drivers’ licenses. Have personal bills sent to your place of work or the post office box. Be discreet about your possessions and family’s personal habits and information.
- **Report any suspicious persons or activities to law enforcement.** If you feel that you or your children have been targeted or are being stalked, report this information to law-enforcement authorities immediately. Do not wait.
- Be involved in your children’s activities. As an active participant, you’ll have a better opportunity to observe how the adults in charge interact with your children. If you are concerned about anyone’s behavior, take it up with the sponsoring organization.
- Practice basic safety skills with your children. Make an outing to a mall or park a “teachable” experience in which your children can practice checking with you, using pay telephones, going to the restroom with a friend, and locating the adults who can help if they need assistance.
- **Be alert to and aware of your surroundings.** Know the “escape routes” and plan what you would do in different emergencies. Know the location of local hospitals and best routes to take to reach them. Know how to reach the nearest local law enforcement agency or sub-station.
- Keep an up-to-date color photograph of your child, a medical and dental history, and have your child fingerprinted.

Remember that there is no substitute for your attention and supervision. Being available and taking time to really know and listen to your children helps build feelings of safety and security.

