

CHILD ABDUCTION... A PARENT'S WORST NIGHTMARE

Now, more than ever, turning on the news is a frightening experience. The thought of yet one more child being abducted and not found, or found and murdered is beyond sickening. Every parent has experienced this helpless feeling in the pit of his / her stomach. As adults, we need to be knowledgeable and educate our children in the same way. Teaching your child what to do if they are in serious trouble should be effective, but not scary to them. They hear things, they know about the latest abductions, and they should. Children are more frightened by their parents' silence than by their instructions on handling a threatening situation.

Sheltering children from harmful situations is certainly a parent's responsibility, however, we often find we have over protected our children or instilled in them an unnecessary fear. What experts are suggesting parents do is allow your child the independence they have earned through maturity, and teach them to take responsibility for their own safety and well being.

Your job as a parent is to encourage your child to think independently, (which begins around age two), and learn to think for themselves and use their gut instincts in any situation that feels uncomfortable. This gut instinct is so incredibly important. It is the same reaction adults have when we are being approached by a "stranger" and a funny, squeamish feeling turns our stomach. This is what's called our inner alarm. We listen to it and react. This is what we want our children to begin to identify on their own and then react, and react fast.

In his new book, *The Safe Child*, Richard C. Gossage states that the issue of child safety is very frightening for adults. As a result, they tend to transmit fear to their children. Child safety and street proofing are about giving your children the confidence to know that they can eventually look after themselves when they are not in your care.

It's important to teach children that things are not always what they seem to be. Although most people have good intentions, there might be some that give them that funny, awkward feeling inside. Teach your child to remove themselves from the situation and immediately run to an adult. Recently on *America's Most Wanted*, they featured several techniques to teach your child for various situations:

- The Grab - If someone grabs them, teach them to rotate their arm fast (like a windmill) and hard in order to force a release and flee.
- The Car Lure - When a stranger rides alongside them slowly in a car attempting to get them to come near the window, teach them to run in the other direction that the car is faced. If a child is taken into a car, explain to them the importance of attracting attention and/or getting out of the situation as quickly as possible. Blow the horn, stomp on the gas pedal, or try to body slam the driver.
- The Bike Ride - If a stranger approaches them while they are riding a bike and grabs them, explain and demonstrate to them to not let go of the bike. A stranger will have a much more difficult time getting a child and a bike into a car.

- The Trunk - Teach your child where the brake lights are in a trunk, and if needed they can pull back the material cover and yank at the wires.

In all of these cases, explain to your child the need to scream for help and to struggle.

All of these techniques and discussions about abductions with your child can be presented as "If you get into trouble..." For more information regarding this featured broadcast go to AMW.com.

Again, it is the silence that scares children, not the discussions of situations and techniques to remain safe.