



SAN FRANCISCO CHILD ABUSE
PREVENTION CENTER

Tips for Talking to Children about Strangers

Although stranger abduction (where a stranger takes a child intending to keep or harm him/her) is rare, it is important to talk to your child about strangers. Often children do not have a clear understanding of who is a stranger or what to do in a potentially dangerous situation.

- 1. Make clear that a stranger is anyone your child doesn't know well.** It's common for children to think that strangers look mean and scary. Explain that no one can tell whether a stranger is nice or safe just by looking at him/her, and children should be careful around all strangers.
- 2. Point out adults your child can trust.** This will help your child better understand the stranger concept and know who to go to if your child needs help.
- 3. Provide your child with basic rules on keeping safe:**
 - When you are by yourself, you are responsible for keeping safe.
 - Check first with a trusted adult before going anywhere or taking anything from someone you don't know well.
 - Safe grown-ups don't ask children for help.
 - Know the full name and phone number of one of your parents or caregivers. Know your home address.
 - "911" is the number to call when there's an emergency.
- 4. Have your child practice saying, "No!" to going with a stranger or taking something from a stranger** by playing the "What If ..." Game (*see* tip sheet on "[Playing the 'What If ...' Game](#)") and doing role plays. Some scenarios you could discuss are:
 - A nice-looking stranger in the park asks your child to come see new puppies.
 - Someone who knows your name and your child's name, but is not someone your child knows well, offers your child a ride home from school.
 - Your child is walking home alone, and a stranger pulls over to ask for directions.
- 5. Teach your child to trust his/her instincts and be assertive with strangers.** It's okay to say, "No!" to adults and is better to be safe than polite.
- 6. If your child asks, "What if they get me anyway?":** Talk about your child's feelings; Reassure your child that he/she is safe; Reinforce the safety rules; and Suggest your child follow his/her instincts.