

*While most kids pass through childhood without ever experiencing physical harm, some are frightened or hurt by crime. As a parent, one of your responsibilities is to teach your children how to protect themselves and respond to threatening situations. And, you should always take the time to listen carefully to your children's fears and feelings about people or places that scare them or make them feel uncomfortable.*

## **What Can You Do?**

### **FIRST, COVER the BASICS**

- Rehearse with children their full name, address, and phone number (including area code) and how to make emergency phone calls from home and public phones.
- Walk the neighborhood with your children. Show them safe places they can go to in an emergency, like a neighbor's house, a block parent or McGruff House, or an open store.
- Tell children never to accept gifts or rides from someone they don't know well.
- Check your neighborhood for areas that threaten children's safety, like brush in wooded areas, overgrown shrubbery, abandoned buildings, bad lighting, vacant lots littered with debris, no sidewalks or bike paths next to busy streets.
- Teach children to go to a store clerk or security guard and ask for help if you become separated in a store or shopping mall. Tell them never to go into the parking lot alone.
- Accompany your children to public restrooms.
- Teach children that no one, not even someone they know, has the right to touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. Tell them they have the right to say "no" to an adult in this situation.

### **AT SCHOOL and PLAY**

- Make sure your children are taking the safest route to school and friends' houses, one that avoids danger spots like alleys, new construction, and wooded areas. Test walk it together.
- Encourage your children to walk and play with friends, not alone, and to stay in well-lit, open areas where others can see them.
- Don't hang a house key around your child's neck. It's a telltale sign that you won't be at home when they return from school. Put it inside a pocket or sock.
- Teach your children to walk confidently and stay alert to what's going on around them.
- Encourage your children to look out for other kids' safety and report anything they see that doesn't seem right.

- Tell your children to stay away from strangers who hang around playgrounds, public restrooms, and empty buildings.
- Teach your children to write down and report to you the license numbers of people who offer rides, loiter around playgrounds or appear to follow them.

### **AT HOME ALONE**

- Make sure your kids can reach you by telephone at work. Post your work number, along with numbers for a neighbor, the police and fire departments, and the poison control center near all your home phones.
- Have your children check in with you at work or with a neighbor when they get home. Agree on rules for having friends over and going to someone else's house when no adult is present.
- Work out an escape plan in case of fire.
- Tell your children never to open the door to a stranger when they are alone in the house or apartment. Caution them about answering the phone and accidentally letting a stranger know they are alone. Kids can always say their parents are busy and take a message.
- Make sure they know how to work the door and window locks and that they use them when they are inside alone.

### **WHAT'S A STRANGER**

- Explain to your children that a stranger is someone they don't know well. A stranger can be a man or woman, well-dressed or shabby, kind or threatening, pretty or ugly. If a stranger tries to follow them or grab them, they should run away, scream, and make lots of noise. Tell them to run to the nearest place where there are people and to shout "This person is trying to hurt me!" or "Stay away from me," instead of a simple "Help".

### **SEXUAL ABUSE**

- It's an unpleasant fact that at least 100,000 children are reported as victims of sexual abuse each year, and experts say the actual number is much higher. Most are girls, but boys can also be victims. It's especially difficult to detect sexual abuse and help the victims because the abuser is often a parent, a relative, a baby-sitter, or close family friend. Children may

not recognize sexual abuse when it happens or even know it's wrong.

- Talk to your children about touches that are appropriate and ones that make them feel uneasy. Stress that they can always talk to you when someone's been touching them in a bad way. Children rarely lie about being the victims of sexual abuse, but some may be too confused or frightened to talk directly about it.
- Be alert for physical and behavioral changes that might signal sexual abuse. Some physical signs are bedwetting, loss of appetite, nightmares, venereal disease, and complaints of pain or irritation around the genital area. Behavioral symptoms may include refusing to go to school or to be alone, increased anxiety or immature behavior, artwork that depicts strange sexual overtones, and a change in attitude toward a relative, neighbor, or a baby-sitter. If your child has been sexually abused, do report it to the police or a child protection agency. You may save other children from being harmed. Seek counseling for your child from a community mental health, child welfare, or sexual abuse treatment program.

### **CHOOSE DAY CARE CENTERS WISELY**

- Find out as much as you can about the program's reputation and whether there have been any past complaints. Is it licensed or regulated in any way?
- Learn about the teachers and caregivers. What are their professional qualifications? Are background checks run before they are hired?
- Make sure you have the right to visit anytime, without an appointment.
- Find out how children relate to the staff. Are they happy and involved, or do they pull away from staff members?
- Ask about the philosophy of discipline.
- Make sure there is parent involvement such as group meetings and parent conferences.
- These guidelines can also be applied to after school programs and baby-sitters. In any child care situation, it's a good idea to drop in unannounced periodically. Never give the organization blanket permission to take your child off the premises. Finally, talk with your child daily about how things are going and investigate problems that worry you or become chronic. Compare notes with other parents

***"Make Sure Your Neighborhood  
Is As Safe As Your Home."***

## EXPLORING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Many voluntary groups run a “Phone Friend” or “Warm Line” that children at home alone can call if they’re scared or lonely.
- There may be a McGruff House program operating in your community. A McGruff House, manned by a responsible resident adult, provides a temporary safe haven for children who may face an emergency such as being bullied, followed or hurt while walking or playing in the neighborhood. Check with your parent-teacher group or law enforcement agency.
- Some youth organizations or local agencies teach “survival skills” classes for kids 6 to 12 years old who may sometimes be at home alone. They cover handling emergencies and basic safety measures.
- Many schools, with the help of volunteers, operate callback programs to inform parents, at home or on the job, if their children are not in school.
- Schools, recreation departments, churches, or community organizations like the Boys Clubs or YMCA/YWCA sponsor after school programs for elementary school children and “drop-in” centers for teens.

## TAKE ACTION TODAY!

- Volunteer to help as a block parent or McGruff House. If you can’t offer your home as a Safe House, you can do things like making phone calls and organizing publicity.
- Investigate day care licensing in your community and state.
- If your child’s school doesn’t include crime prevention in its curriculum, work with the parents’ association, teachers’ groups, and law enforcement to change the situation.
- Lobby for sensitive treatment of child victims.
- Invite the Crime Prevention Officer of the police or sheriff’s department to talk about children’s safety to a neighborhood meeting of parents and children.



**HELP ME, McGRUFF  
TAKE A BITE OUT OF CRIME!**



Crime  
Prevention  
Tips from:

### The National Crime Prevention Council

1000 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.  
13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20036

and



### Plano Police Department

Crime Prevention Unit  
909 14th Street  
Plano, Texas 75074

CITY OF PLANO  
EMERGENCY



POLICE - FIRE - MEDICAL

*For additional information please call the:*

**Plano Police Department  
Crime Prevention Unit**

at

**972-941-2431**

or visit the web

**www.planopolice.org**

# SAFETY SKILLS FOR CHILDREN

**WOULD YOUR CHILD  
KNOW WHAT  
TO DO IF...**



- He got lost at a shopping mall?
- A nice-looking, friendly stranger offered her a ride home after school?
- A baby-sitter wanted to play a secret game that no one would know about?
- She was at home alone and the doorbell rang?
- A friend dared him to hitchhike?

**Plano Police Department Crime Prevention Unit**

REV. 5/2013