



The  
**Common Tricks**  
used in  
**Child Abductions**

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(Courtesy of Victims of Violence)



**DEAR PARENT:**

This brochure on “common tricks used in child abduction” is designed to assist you in teaching your children personal safety. A knowledge of these “tricks” and how to respond to them will greatly assist your children should they be approached by someone wanting to do them harm. We recommend that you go through this brochure first and then discuss the different situations in the brochure with your children. Some parents have found that role-playing the different situations with children with an emphasis on their response can be very effective.

Please remember that the “tricks” discussed in this brochure are only the more common ones and that those who prey upon children are sometimes innovative in their efforts. The key to personal safety for children is in the awareness by the child of some of these examples and the knowledge that they can be assertive in order to protect themselves. They have a right to say “no” to adults. Also teach them to come to you with any incidents that sound similar to those described. Call your local police immediately should this occur.

**COMMON TRICKS USED IN CHILD ABDUCTION**

"Stay away from strangers" and "Don't talk to strangers" are probably the most common warnings parents give their children in an attempt to prevent abduction or exploitation. Unfortunately, these warnings ignore everything that is known about the people who commit these crimes against children, leaving children vulnerable to those who would prey upon them.

To begin with, the term "stranger" suggests a concept that children do not understand. It misleads children into believing that they should only be wary of individuals who have an unusual or slovenly appearance. In the real world though, child molesters and abductors are very normal looking individuals coming from all walks of life. They can be, and in most cases are, someone known to the parent and child. As a matter of fact, research has shown that upwards of 80% of all sex crimes against children are committed by someone known to the child - someone the child would not consider being a "stranger."

No matter how many times a child has been warned against "talking to strangers" they will, in their normal day to day activities, regularly talk to strangers. Most people love children. When they see a child, it is quite normal to respond with a smile and sometimes a brief conversation. The mailman and the milkman will

smile and say "hi" when they pass the child on the walk. The store clerk might carry on a brief conversation with a child to relieve some of the boredom of a quiet day. The new teacher or principal will normally be kind and friendly to children and rightly so - they would not be in that profession if they didn't genuinely care about children. All of these incidences convince the child over a period of time that mom and dad were wrong with their warnings about strangers. Is the new babysitter not a "stranger" for a period of time? Is the new day care worker not a stranger for the first few weeks?

To counter this problem, some parents choose to promote the terms "good" and "bad" strangers. From a child's point of view, this has to be even more confusing. When the "good" stranger asks the child to do something that doesn't seem right how should the child respond? When the child is in need of help, the person that the child was warned about as possibly being a "bad" stranger may be the only person available that might be able to assist the child. Remember that the majority of people would respond and assist a child in trouble. We also tell our children to go to a store clerk or security for help should they get lost. Is this person not a "stranger?"

So, what can a concerned parent do then to prevent a possible crime against their children?

It is more appropriate to teach children to respond to certain situations, rather than certain kinds of individuals . . .

A clear, calm and reasonable message about "situations and actions" is much easier for a child to understand than a particular image or profile of a stranger. Research has shown that those who prey upon children, whether they are strangers or someone known to the child, use only a selected number of ploys or tricks to attract their prey. If children are taught these tricks and how to respond to them should they be approached, their chances of being victimized are greatly diminished.

These are the more common "tricks" used by child abductors in order of occurrences (some descriptions may overlap, but abductors may use more than one type of lure):

### **1. Assistance:**

Children should be taught that adults do not normally ask children for assistance - they ask other adults. If they are asked, children will normally be eager to assist an adult carrying some packages to the car or into a home. They will also be eager to help the teacher with a school project and rightfully so, but there is a difference between the class working on a school project or one child being singled out to assist. The intent of the lure is to get the child away from his or her friends or from a public place where the assault can take place. Examples of this lure include someone asking the child for assistance in "finding a lost puppy," "opening the car door" at the far end of the parking lot or

"assistance in carrying these packages in from the car." No matter who does the asking, even if it is dad's friend "Uncle Bill" or the school principal, the key is to remember that they should be cautious of situations in which the adult has arranged to be alone with the child.

## **2. Job Offer:**

The abductor approaches the child with an offer of a job. He or she may even dress the part by wearing suitable clothes that would convince the child and the child's friends that the offer is legitimate. Part of the ploy could include the use of a uniform, a construction hard hat or a business suit. Again the lure is intended to first develop some form of trust with the child and then to take the child away from the child's circle of safety, the child's friends and neighbourhood. Children should be taught that, should anyone approach them with an offer for a job, that they cannot, under any circumstances go with that person into their home or into their car. All job offers, including babysitting, should be checked out and verified by parents. If your teenage daughter comes home with a possible babysitting position, the prospective employer would actually feel more comfortable leaving their child with a sitter whose parents are concerned enough to check them out. Don't be afraid to call the prospective employer and tell them that you wish to come to their home and meet with them prior to your daughter beginning work. When you visit their home decide then whether the atmosphere is one in which you would feel comfortable with your child being there.

## **3. Authority:**

The abductor poses as a person of authority, such as a police officer, security guard, construction superintendent, or anyone else that could be considered by the child to be a person of authority. He or she approaches the child and at times will tell the child that he or she is arresting the child for drugs, theft, or anything that might sound reasonable or possible to the child. Handcuffs, at times, have been used with older children. Children should be taught that they have the right to question authority. Credentials of any person wanting to take a child somewhere should be checked out by a teacher or parent before the child is allowed to go anywhere with that person. Children should also be taught that police do not normally approach children in the schoolyard to speak with them. Should the occasion arise, even in an emergency, where the police would want to speak with a child at school they will go to the office. If a store clerk wants to question your child for possible theft they will not take the child from the store. They will ask them to come to a security office in the store. The key here again is to not leave the store with someone even if they say that they are with the store security. The intent of these ploys is to remove the child from the normal safe area, which means "other people."

#### **4. Fear:**

The abductor uses threats or shows a weapon to get the child to go along. Children should be taught that their best chance in this type of situation is when they are still in an area where other people are around. In other words, under no circumstances, even with the threat of a weapon should a child leave a "safe area," such as a shopping mall and go with the person issuing the threats. The abductor gains control of the situation only when they have left the area where the child can get help. Should the occasion arise, the child's best chance for escape is to scream as loudly as possible "Please help me! This is not my father/mother." The offender is not going to stay around. He is going to find the nearest exit and be gone. At this point, it is also important that children notify police of the attempted abduction. This response might save the life of another innocent child. Fear is also used as a means of continuing an established relationship with a child. "If you tell anyone, I'll get your younger sister." Children should be taught that, no matter what the circumstances, you, as a parent, will listen to them and help them should they be in any situation where they feel threatened by anyone.

#### **5. Gifts:**

Those who prey upon children still commonly use candy as a means of attracting them. Beer and drugs are also used to attract older children. The intent is to make the child feel obligated to them and henceforth willing to go with them somewhere. Parents should also be concerned should their child come home with new clothes, stereo equipment or anything else of value that their child may not have a reasonable explanation for. Parents have the right to question all gifts or anything coming into their home even if the gifts are from a friend of the parents. Remember that someone known to the family commits the majority of crimes committed against children. Is a friend of the family taking a special interest in one of your children? If so, why? It is not normal for adults to bestow gifts upon children without an apparent reason. Does this same person offer to baby sit your child? Does this person spend excessive amounts of time at your home and possibly engage in games or "horseplay" with your children? You have a right to question this person's motives.

#### **6. Modelling, Photo or Beauty Contests:**

One of the oldest ploys is to make the child feel "special," asking the child to pose for pictures or telling the child that he or she should "be in pictures." Abductors are known to have expensive cameras and at times rented studios. Photo sessions are even real sometimes to develop the child's confidence, in time though, turning to pornography and seduction. They pose as newspaper photographers, television cameramen or modelling agency "scouts" and approach the child with suggestions of stardom. The child is told not to tell, but to "surprise mom and dad when they see you in a television commercial." Real agencies, studios or media obviously do not work like this. They would have a parent's consent before ever talking to the

child about a "modelling career." Children should be taught to report to their parents (or teachers at school) any offer of "picture taking" sessions modelling or media interview offers. Parents should then check the photographer out with their company to see if it is real. If it is, parents should go along with their children to any sessions or interviews.

### **7. Games and Fun:**

Abductors have been known to pose as a clown or even join in games with children in order to develop trust with the child. This can sometimes take place over an extended period of time. Arcades, for instance, are probably the most common place for abductors to go in an effort to meet children. They might become "regulars" at the video arcade and even give money to the children for games in an attempt to develop trust with the children. Eventually, as with the "gifts" lure, it is a means of creating a situation where the child owes the person something making it hard for the child to turn down a request for a "favour." Children should be taught to be wary of any adult or even an older child wanting to take part in any games of fun with them. It is not uncommon, for instance, for a child molester to engage in "horseplay" with a child regularly and then eventually begin "accidental touchings." These "accidental touchings" get more frequent over a period of time leading to actual fondling. Fun and games are okay, but anything unusual should be reported to someone they trust.

### **8. Attention and Love, Confidence and Trust:**

This "lure" is a part of many of the other "tricks." The abductor will use some form of "attention" to gain the child's "confidence." Child abductors and molesters sometimes develop a relationship with the child over a period of time, which eventually leads to sex or abduction. Parents should be concerned should any adult or older child take a "special interest" in their child. At times the offender will feign attempts at caring for the child's needs, such as offering a back rub, or offering to bath the child; thus providing themselves with actual physical contact. It is their means of gaining an intimacy with the child that they can exploit. Parents should be concerned when a neighbour regularly invites their child over to "watch television" or to "use the pool" or if an adult seems to be developing a relationship with their child through school, clubs or sports. Many adults do devote countless hours to volunteer work with children and this is obviously commendable. However, if an adult seems to be singling out your child with "special interest," you have the right to question that. Remember too, that those who prey upon children will, in many cases, use known organizations as a means of meeting children. Although these organizations do have "screening" processes, the offender may not have a criminal record.

## **9. Computers and the Internet:**

With the recent evolution of the "information highway," children need to be wary of a new breed of abductor. The information highway allows people from all over the world to communicate with one another. Those who pose a danger to children have adopted this power as a new means of access to children. The offender will seek a child who appears lonely or a child who may be having trouble with his/her parents. The offender may lie to the child about his/her age. After developing a relationship, the offender may suggest to the child that they meet. If the child agrees, the offender will use this opportunity to abduct or sexually assault the child. Parents should monitor what the child does and sees on the information highway. While a computer may seem harmless, it can be very dangerous if the wrong person is on the other end. Parents are encouraged to explore the computer with the child, and make sure the child tells them about any "friends" they have made. Finally, the child should not go to meet anyone they have met on the computer. If someone does try and meet your child, contact authorities immediately. This person may be contacting other children as well.

### **As a parent . . .**

.....teach your children that they can be assertive in order to protect themselves. Give them the confidence they need to question a situation that does not seem right to them. Teach them to respect their instincts.

.....establish an atmosphere in your home in which your child feels truly comfortable in discussing sensitive matters and in relating experiences in which someone may have approached the child in an inappropriate manner or in a way that made the child feel uncomfortable.

.....if your child does come to you with an experience that sounds similar to one of these tricks call authorities immediately. Another child may not respond the way your child did and may be in danger.

Most important, make your home a place of trust and support that fulfills your child's needs.

### **For more information contact:**

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