



the legitimacy. If it isn't legitimate, they should return home immediately, make sure a trusted adult is with the child or call the police. It is essential that callers are convinced that children aren't home alone.

The telephone can be of great benefit to your child if she is prepared to use it under appropriate circumstances. Children should be taught how to use different types of phones and encouraged to phone their parents when uneasy or afraid. Be certain that children carry coinage for a phone call, or know how to reverse the charges from a pay phone. When left with a sitter, it is wise to occasionally phone and ask to speak directly with the child. Have numbers of people you trust posted by the phone to be used in an emergency including trusted neighbours, family members, doctor, 911. Always leave a number where you can be reached.

THE INTERNET

Although a wonderful information and communication tool, the Internet poses some risks. Some sites traffic in violence, hate and inappropriate sexual material. Some people misrepresent who they are as they strike up 'friendships' on chat lines etc. They pose as young people when they are actually adults, sometimes pedophiles. So, remember, never give out personal information on chat lines or send personal photos over the net. Chat is probably the most dangerous area on the Internet. Keep your identity private and never allow children to meet with someone met online without your knowledge. If you feel it's appropriate to meet, always go with the child and meet in a public place. Be especially careful of anyone who tries to turn children against parents, teachers or friends. As a general rule, computers should be kept in high traffic areas and not in areas that are private and unsupervised such as a child's bedroom. There are blocking/filtering programs that can be used to block objectionable material but remember these can't protect your children from all the dangers of cyberspace. If someone sends messages that are obscene, lewd etc. with the intent to harass or threaten, report it to your Internet service provider.

Family Safety Procedures

Be diligent to maintain safety procedures through practice and discussion. If you handle the subject in 'a matter of fact' non-emotional fashion, fears aren't likely

to develop. Discuss topics when opportune eg. the dangers of hitch-hiking when you have observed someone hitching a ride. Assure children that if they got lost, you would always go looking for them, no matter how long it took. Also assure them that even if they have failed to follow safety procedures, you won't get mad. It is more important for children to tell you their concerns than to be silent because they are afraid of discipline. The issue of parent anger is often used as a threat by unscrupulous people.

EMERGENCY CODE WORD

Some families use an Emergency Code Word (ECW). This is a word that has been agreed upon by both the parents and the child signalling danger to the parent or safety for the child. This word must be kept secret with only the child and parents knowing. The ECW can also be used by the parent with another adult to indicate to the child that he can trust that person. This person should be known to the children.

The ECW should be used at the beginning of the discussion, thus establishing that the contact is appropriate. Children should be advised to always keep a safe distance if a stranger attempts to engage them in a discussion. Any time the ECW is used outside the family, it should be changed.

CHILD'S PERSONAL INFORMATION FILE

Many parents keep an updated confidential file containing personal information including: birth certificates, recent face and profile pictures, fingerprints, blood type, record of scars or birthmarks, medical concerns, a current list of friends, their phone numbers and addresses, a list of adults involved with your child including their phone numbers, a description of your child's recreational habits and major interests, a list of places and their phone numbers which your child frequents, child's complaints and/or identification of individuals who have made questionable approaches toward them; this includes threats, bribes, or incidents of picture taking, and the child's current ECW.

GOOD SAFETY PRACTICES

- Always walk to and from school with friends and avoid isolated places on the school ground, parks etc.
- If children are offered a job, parents should always check it out first.
- Encourage children to tell someone if something happens to them (a parent, teacher, Block Parent etc).



SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 38 (RICHMOND)



Working Together to Keep Our Children Safe

Those early days of parenting were difficult. So many questions. So much you didn't know. But before long, you found family and friends who had answers. You grew confident and as you did, you shaped a world for your children that was protected and safe.

But the ongoing process of parenting isn't so easily defined or controlled. As your children grew, so did the boundaries of their world. This expanding world was just waiting to be explored. But this exploration presents a large challenge. As a parent, how do you create an environment that allows your children to venture out yet do so safely?

As a school district, we know there are no simple answers for a question such as this, nor is there any set of rules that will fit every family or every situation. However we believe the following principles and suggestions will help you create a safer environment for you and your children.



Know your Neighbourhood

From your child's perspective, tour the area with your child checking areas where children gather (playgrounds, parks, vacant lots/buildings, woods, ravines, shopping malls, corner stores); know objects or areas that may pose a physical danger (animals, traffic, adults/children). Learn the whereabouts of centers that offer supervised activities. Be aware of what is occurring in your community, taking appropriate steps to protect your child yet without creating undue fear.

Know the People who Have Contact with your Child

Many adults fondly remember those special people, teachers, neighbours, coaches, who taught us skills and gave us value. They were people who cared. Sometimes, in our effort to protect our children, we may forget that the majority of people involved in our children's lives are people just like them. With this said, you are always wise to get to know the people involved with your children. Trust your instincts. If you have the slightest doubt about a person, don't leave your children in his or her care.

CHILD'S FRIENDS OR PEER GROUP

Meet and obtain names, phone numbers and addresses of the children with whom your children spend time. What do they like to do? Where do they like to go? What are their parents like? Are their attitudes and values consistent with yours?

NEIGHBOURHOOD PARENTS

If your child is playing with a neighbour's child, don't hesitate to go and introduce yourself. If your child is playing at a neighbour's house, understand that your child is under that person's supervision, is following their rules and is exposed to the attitudes and values demonstrated by that family. Be certain that you are comfortable with the physical/emotional safety standards such as what is discussed in front of the children or what your child may be viewing. If your youngster is spending a lot of time with particular friends, attempt to spend some extended time with their parents.

BABYSITTERS

Be cautious in selection and screening. Select people you know and trust: family, friends—preferably those with children, sitters recommended by trusted friends. Choosing only girls for sitters doesn't guarantee a safe situation and may eliminate a good male sitter. For people outside your close associations, ask for references, their experience, what they would do in an emergency etc. If the person can't provide references, look elsewhere.

Prepare your children to be with a sitter. Review expected conduct being certain to discuss requests they shouldn't obey eg. doing something that feels funny or they do not understand, being forced to do something by the use of threat or offered bribes to do something that they feel unsure about, and being encouraged by the sitter to keep secrets, particularly from their parents.

Prepare the babysitter by explaining that your children don't keep secrets and have permission to say no if they don't understand a request. Also review family rules of conduct that you want the sitter to enforce. Follow up with the sitter and your children about their time together. Check out protests or negative feelings expressed by either.

STRANGER AWARENESS

Usually by age four a child can be taught the difference between an outsider and a trusted family member. It is important that a child understands that a stranger is any person that your child does not know well. Be very clear, children should never get involved with strangers who are seeking help or direction. They can ask other adults. Also children should not agree to have their picture taken without your approval. If these things happen, tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.

OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES

Children who attend an activity, scout meeting, day camp, Sunday school are usually adequately supervised and safe. But as a parent, it is wise to determine: the qualifications, philosophy and competence of those involved, the amount of supervision and by whom, and the models of behaviour that will be presented.

Get to know those involved with your children. Volunteer or attend activities or have family or friends attend. Make surprise visits. Check arrangements for activities that are away from the regular meeting place.

If your children arrive at an activity/school especially early or leave especially late, don't assume that they will be supervised. Situations such as these are usually unsupervised. And remember, if your child will be absent or is leaving school early for an appointment/activity, be certain to notify the school.

Safety Procedures

Establish and maintain safety rules for the children and family. Included should be rules of conduct for the home and community including rules on personal safety. Encourage children to always inform adults of concerning incidents (bullying, stranger contacts, uncomfortable contacts on the Internet etc.)

Risks at Home

ANSWERING THE DOOR

When the doorbell rings, children naturally rush to open the door. This should be discouraged. Consider—do you want your children to open the door if home alone or with a babysitter, even if they know the caller? What does the child do if the caller is persistent—leaves and returns, claims to be in distress (an emergency), is a family member or friend, tries to carry on a conversation through the door? Children who come home alone, should unlock the door, calling out, "Hi Mom, I'm home. Right. Practice was cancelled so I'm home early." The latter comment implies a discussion with someone at home.

ANSWERING OR USING THE PHONE

In the hands of an inexperienced child, the phone can be an inappropriate source of information—who's home, when adults will return etc. A caller must never learn that a child is home alone. Teach them to answer in a manner that provides a minimum of information. All callers should be treated the same, no matter how pleasant they may seem. Safe responses are: "My parents can't come to the phone right now" or "What is your name and number? They will call you shortly." If children are home alone or with a sitter, they should call their parents giving them the message. Parents should then immediately call the number to check out