

SAFEGUARDING

Keeping your child safe away from home

Keeping our children safe at all times is a big worry for most parents.

We worry about them when they are at school, home or when they are playing out of sight.

Family Lives understands the concern parents feel when letting their children explore their environment independently. They have compiled top tips in conjunction with [SAFE network](#); here are golden rules to help you keep your child safe while they develop their independence:

- **Name, address, number:** as soon as children are able to understand, teach them their full name, address and telephone number. Practice these with them until you're sure they can remember.
- **Keep in sight:** in most situations, children under about eight years old shouldn't be out alone, especially in busy towns. Even when out playing, they need to be kept in sight of an adult or a trustworthy older child.
- **Never leave alone:** don't leave young children in unsupervised play areas in shops or parks, or in a car or outside a shop, even for a few minutes.
- **Hold on:** when you're in a crowded place, hold hands or keep children in a buggy, or use reins. Don't walk ahead of a toddler – it only takes a moment for them to wander off.
- **Start young:** you can begin teaching children about safety when they're as young as two or three. Tell them clearly they mustn't go off with anyone, not even someone they know, without first asking you or the adult looking after them. With older children, make sure they remember to tell you who they are going out with, where they are going and when they'll be back.
- **Practice:** teach older children safe ways of crossing roads, going shopping and asking adults for directions. Let them practice with you until you are sure that they've understood. Always remember the limits of their age and maturity. Teaching them about safety needn't mean being overprotective – let them gradually take more responsibility as their awareness develops.
- **Safe place:** in busy public places, arrange somewhere safe to meet in case you get separated, like an information desk. Make sure children know what to do if they ever get lost, and explain who is safest to ask for help – a police officer, shop assistant or someone with a young child.
- **Feel good:** build your child's self-esteem with lots of love, praise and attention. Bullies may tend to pick out less confident children or those who are neglected and often left alone.
- **Say no:** let children know that they never have to do anything they don't like with an adult or older child, even if it's someone they know.
- **Listen:** when your child is trying to tell you about things that worry them. Is there a bully at school, or an after-school club activity that they're not comfortable with?

Possessions/valuables: make sure your child knows to keep valuables hidden from temptation of others especially on the streets and in parks - often attacks happen when others see an opportunity present itself; get them to use smart phones when they are needed and not just for having conversations and browsing websites while they are walking the streets – firstly they are not focusing on dangers around them, secondly they may get unwanted attention from others; thirdly other children may be exposed to content that their parents may wish them not to see.

Have these conversations 'with' your children and not 'to' your children. Talk about the dangers openly and regularly. Be good role models so the children learn from you.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy.

Halina Rooney

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