Lee's Summit Police Department

# Neighborhood News

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**National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)**

The NCMEC serves as the nation's clearinghouse for missing and sexually exploited children. Their webpage provides resources to families, law enforcement, and attorneys.

www.missingkids.com

**May 25th**

May 25th is National Missing Children's Day that was dedicated in 1983. This day encourages parents, guardians, caregivers, and others concerned with the well-being of children to make child safety a priority.

**National Sex Offender Public Website**

Managed by the U.S. Dept of Justice, this webpage offers educational resources for parents, including tips on talking to your children and recognizing sexual abuse.

www.nsopr.gov/en

## A Parent's Guide to Child Abduction Prevention

When media outlets report a child abduction, our protective parental instincts lead us down thought paths we're never really prepared to venture. We fearfully wonder, "What if that had been my child?" We ask ourselves, "Would my child say 'no' if a stranger offered him a ride?" "A piece of candy?" "What if a stranger asked a question? Would my child walk to the car window or run away?"

Though it's important for parents to educate their children about "stranger danger," the emotional fallout we experience during nationally-covered child abduction cases can leave us focusing on the wrong risks.

For example, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reported that in 1999, only 115 of 258,000 abducted children were kidnapped by strangers. Most abducted children were taken by family members, family friends, or acquaintances of the child. [1] Most children were taken by adults they had been taught to trust.

Though the statistics may sound alarming, there are a few key steps every parent can take to protect their children from abduction. First, parents need to spend some time educating themselves about child predators and how they manipulate, entice, and trick children into harmful situations. Second, parents should facilitate *on-going*, age-appropriate conversations with their children about child predators and the risks of abduction.

Since reports of child abductions seem to pepper our highway messaging boards, cell phones, and social media news feeds, you may be surprised to learn that child abductions committed by strangers are on the decline. We have, however, become much more efficient in sharing critical information quickly thanks to new technology and the AMBER Alert program. Since it's inception in 1996, AMBER Alert has led to the successful recovery of 688 missing children (as of April 2, 2014). [1]

**Stranger Abductions**

Though stranger abductions are rare, it's still important to know the risk factors and teach your children how to defend themselves. The NCMEC Case Analysis Unit compiled 9 years worth of data and found the below risk factors in attempted stranger abductions:

The average victim was female 10-14 years of age walking to or from school/school activity. Victims usually escaped by walking or running away without any physical contact with the perpetrator. Only 15% of the perpetrators were registered sex offenders at the time of the offense. [2]

Additionally, in the rare event that a child was abducted and murdered, the perpetrator usually carried out his crime within the first 3 hours of the abduction. [1]

*What can we learn from these facts?* Children need to be taught how to deal with strangers. They may not recognize a stranger as "dangerous" if the person is nice, pretty, clean-shaven, smiling, etc. Set clear boundaries with your children regarding what times they are allowed to talk to strangers (only when an adult of your choosing is present) and what type of information is ok to discuss. Explain the difference between a safe stranger (police officer, firefighter, teacher) and a stranger you don't trust. Point out strangers while you're in public so your child will learn the concept. Talk about the risk factors with your children and let them practice scenarios with you. Evaluate their actions, offer direction, then let them repeat the roll play until you're comfortable

# Continued...Child Abduction Prevention

with their response. Teach them to run away if a stranger approaches, and reassure them that they won't get in trouble for being assertive with a stranger who makes them uncomfortable.

**Known Perpetrators**

Children have a much greater risk of being taken by a family member, a family friend, or an acquaintance. This type of child predator uses "grooming techniques" to slowly gain your trust, then your child's. Preventing these attacks is much more difficult, but can be accomplished through *ongoing* safety conversations with your children.

Child predators may target children who have fewer adults in their lives or who are naturally reserved, thus being less likely to tell on the offender. One of the predator's first steps is to befriend the parent then become the "helpful friend you can always count on" to drive your child to soccer practice, take him out for ice cream, or pick him up from school. This process may occur slowly overtime as the predator works in small steps to gain the parent's full trust. An adult who takes a special interest in any of your children, or requests time alone with them—or creates time alone with them behind your back—should be considered a potential threat.

Teach your children that adults should never share secrets with them. If they find themselves in a situation where an adult has asked them to keep a secret, your child should tell you immediately. Give your child examples of "safe adults" by helping them make a list of adults they're allowed to spend time with alone. Make sure your children understand that they should never go with anyone else, even if the adult says he has your permission. Use a family password if you must send someone outside the "safe adults" list to pick up your child.

Have "the talk" with your children about keeping private parts private. Make sure they understand from a young age that body parts covered by undergarments should not be touched, on top of or underneath clothing.

Teach your children about personal space boundaries. Adults shouldn't press those boundaries but if they do, children should be taught to tell parents immediately. Finally, make sure your child is comfortable telling adults "no". Complacent children who are taught to never question adults are often groomed by child predators because they're easy targets. Empowering children to say "no" to an adult friend or family member who's trying to take advantage of them is an important step in child abuse prevention.

In addition to the resources listed in the sidebar, parents of preschoolers should visit www.babycenter.com/0_how-to-talk-to-your-child-about-strangers_3657124.bc for an explanation of what you can expect your child to understand between the ages of 2-4.

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Sign up for alerts from the City of Lee's Summit, including trending crime information by visiting www.Nixle.com. Alerts will be sent to you via text or email, whichever you prefer.

Visit our webpage at lspolice.net for information on crime prevention, ordinances, community programs and more.

Sources Cited

*1 Key Facts.* Alexandria, Va.: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, accessed February 27, 2014, at www.missingkids.com/keyfacts.

2 Attempted Abductions. Alexandria, Va.: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, accessed February 27, 2014, at www.missingkids.com/attemptedabductions.

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