

Hunterdon County Sheriff's Office
WHAT DO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS ABDUCTED OR MISSING

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A Message From The Hunterdon County Sheriff's Office:

Education and prevention are the most effective measures to ensure the safety of our children. This information provides guidelines to help protect your children from abduction by strangers. In addition, since many children are missing because they have run away, guidelines have been included to assist parent in spotting a potential runaway and a checklist for parents who suspect their child has run away.

Help Protect Your Child

Communication with your child is very important. Be someone your child can talk to. Be sensitive to changing moods and behavior.

If you find yourself in a position where a child appeals to you for help, be prepared to offer it. Never belittle your child's problems or fears.

Discussing safety with your child should not be a frightening type situation, but rather an informative matter-of-fact discussion, effectiveness of prevention.

Teach your children, at an early age, the facts about abduction and what it means.

Define what a stranger is. Let your child know that just because they see someone every day (i.e. older students or neighbors) this does not mean that these people are not strangers.

Teach your children their full name, your name, address and telephone number, including area codes.

Teach your child how to use a telephone. Explain how to make a local and long distance phone call. Practice using a pay telephone.

Get a map and allow your child to color in their home state so that they can understand its name and geographic location.

Make sure your child never accepts gifts or treats from strangers. Encourage them to tell you about anyone who approaches them and offers them anything or wants to take their picture.

Give your permission to say NO to an adult. Be sure they realize that not every adult has authority over children, especially if that adult has asked your children to do something that you have taught them is wrong.

Be sure that your children understand that no one has the right to touch them on any part of their body that a bathing suit covers. Advise them to tell you about it if someone does.

Teach your children to tell you if someone has asked them to keep a secret from you.

Never allow your children to approach a car to offer directions. Abductors will prey upon a child's naiveness and sense of sympathy.

Explain to your children that adults rarely ask children for help. If someone asks them for directions or help, your children should be taught to ignore them, leave for a safe place and report the incident to you.

Teach your child that if they are being followed, and cannot run safely home or to a public place, they should yell for help. They should never just run and hide because they may put themselves in an isolated location and vulnerable to attack.

Take a look at your children daily. Know what they are wearing when they leave the house.

Avoid dressing your children in clothing that has their names printed on them. Make sure that your children know that just because someone knows their name, this does not mean the person knows them.

Be involved in your child's activities. Know the locations of places he/she goes. Know all of the adults that your child will be associated with.

Know the names of children's friends. Know where they live and how to reach them.

Be aware of your children's route to school. Encourage children to buddy up. A child who is part of a group is less vulnerable than a child who goes alone.

Instruct schools, baby-sitters and friends who are caring for your child, not to allow your child to go with anyone but you, unless otherwise arranged.

Be extremely cautious in selecting baby-sitters and day care centers. Always check references. Know the people who are responsible for your child.

Children who are home alone should never open the door to strangers. Be sure the doors and windows in your home are secure.

Children who are home alone should never volunteer information to anyone on the telephone that they are home alone.

Post emergency telephone numbers at the phone and write your address near these numbers so your child can easily let authorities know the locations.

Insist that your child contact someone if they feel that something is suspicious. Children should be taught to recognize suspicious behavior so that a description of the person or incident can be given to you or the police.

Never leave your children unattended in a vehicle. It is a proven fact that it takes less than five seconds to abduct a child from a car.

Keep your children in sight at all times. Shopping malls are crowded and offer abductors an easy place to pick up children.

Always accompany your child to the bathroom in a public place.

Teach your children what to do if you and he/she become separated at a grocery store or shopping mall. Instruct them to go directly to the cashier or checkout counter and tell the clerk that they are lost. Whatever you do, teach them not to try going home alone or looking for you in the parking lot.

Develop a family password that only you and your child know. Teach the child that this is important and that they should never go with anyone, not even someone they recognize, who doesn't know the password.

Items of Importance to be Kept in a Safe Place

A recent, clear, color photograph of your child. A close-up photograph of your child showing his/her ears is recommended. Photographs should be taken at least once a year. If the child is under age two (2), photos should be taken at least four (4) times a year.

Write a detailed description of your child. Include the following:

- Age
- height
- weight
- hair color
- eye color
- moles
- birthmarks
- scars
- any "different" physical characteristics your child may have

Update this information at least once a year.

Make sure that medical and dental records are readily available to you and, if possible, keep a copy of the records for your own file. Note each child's blood type, major medical problems, broken bones, pulled teeth, braces, glasses, etc. Also, note any chronic health problems, prescription medication and allergies.

Have your child fingerprinted and keep the prints along with the other information.

A Guide For Parents - Spotting a Potential Runaway

Troubles at School: Plummeting grades, truancy, class-cutting, disciplinary problems and fallouts with close friends all can be cries for help that come before bolting.

Family Crisis: Death, divorce, illness, a loss of a job, or a major move can disrupt the family constellation and equally so, your child's view of his/her own security and role in life.

Diminished Communication: There may be a perfectly good reason by your child becomes withdrawn. But if you can't think of one and it persists, pay attention.

Parental Stack-blowing: Are you, not the child, getting unreasonably upset over the smallest things? Your feelings may be trying to tell you something (a subtle but significant shift in family balance that needs heeding).

Increased Sleeping: It's normal for adolescents to sleep more than parents think is healthy. However, sudden marathons may present warnings of depression or problems they can't manage.

Increased Violations: Results are boundaries against which growing youths must lean or hurl themselves, in the act of maturity. But take heed when "border incidents" turn to real rebellion.

Abrupt Mood Swings: Take notice if a normal teenager turns sullen, withdrawn, angry, even maniacal without warning.

Excessive Blowups: Tantrums are common with teenagers but watch out when the smallest thing repeatedly seems to trigger an explosion of temper.

Growing Isolation: The child avoids family gatherings, even at meals, and spends more and more time in his or her room alone.

Unexplained Money or Possessions: Even if they're not stolen, they may be hidden for an impending getaway. Obviously, individual circumstances should tell you when concern is called for.

When You Suspect Your Child Has Run Away

A Checklist for Parents

Contact the police. Request an investigation. Also request that your child's name be placed into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and New Jersey Tele-type System (NJLETS). Ensure that you provide the police correct information about your child (name, date of birth, description, etc.)

Ensure that someone stays at home in the event the child returns or someone calls with information.

Try to keep a telephone line open in your home; make calls from another telephone if possible.

Search your entire home starting with our child's room - look for notes, telephone numbers, photos or anything that can help to indicate where your child could have gone. Also look for road maps.

Did he/she take clothing or luggage? Provide a description to the police of missing items.

Contact neighbors.

Contact relatives.

Contact your child's school.

Contact area hospitals.

Check to see if any of your child's friends are also missing, they may be together.

Contact all known friends of your child. Also inquire if they know of any other friends of your child that you can contact. Tell them that in the event your child calls them ask:

his/her location; phone number;

is he/she with anyone;

is he/she safe;

does he/she want help;

what is his/her destination.

Check all bus, train and airplane terminals in your area. Also check to see if a vehicle or bicycle is missing.

If your child was employed, contact their employer and co-workers.

If your child is of military age, check the local recruiters offices.

Examine all of your previous phone bills for telephone numbers.

Search for various places of interest of your child.

Search the malls that are located near your home.

Contact the National Center for Missing Children at 1-800-843-5768 or 1-202-634-9821.

Obtain recent photographs of your child and provide them to the police for distribution of flyers and posters.

If a child is believed to be traveling to New York City; and you can ascertain bus line, contact the Port Authority, Youth Services Unit at 1-212-502-2205.

If You Need Any Further Information Please Contact:

New Jersey State Police Missing Persons Unit

P.O. Box 7068

West Trenton, New Jersey 08625

609-882-2000, extensions 2893 - 2894 - 2895

OR

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

1835 K Street, N.W.

Suite 700

Washington, DC 10006

1-800-843-5678 * 202-634-9821

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children was established to address the missing and exploited children issue and is designed to assist families, citizen groups, law enforcement agencies and governmental institutions in a national effort to ensure the safety and protection of our nation's children.