

Stranger Danger

Misguided concepts of stranger danger are passed down to younger children, leaving a large opening for confusion in critical personal safety situations.

We're all strangers to someone. The police constable visiting your child's school is a stranger, your new pediatrician is a stranger, your child's new principal is a stranger—and the pedophile down the street is a stranger. Nothing differentiates these people in a child's mind.

Society has embraced the concept that strangers are dangerous, and people known to us are safe. Yet statistics show that most cases of child maltreatment, sexual abuse, and abductions are perpetrated by people known to the child or family.

Instruct children to focus on the action, not the person. If a child is the potential victim of unwanted touch or luring, that is no time to be grappling with confusion about why this “safe” person is initiating such behaviour. Keeping the focus on the action empowers children and encourages reporting to safe and caring adults.

Teach children the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Children should be taught to readily identify inappropriate touching no matter who it comes from. Touch from a family member feels confusing, but the child can know that the action itself is wrong.

Thwart luring or abduction. In the case of potential luring or abduction, children need clear and simple guidelines to identify safe and unsafe situations, no matter who the offending person may be.

- One simple rule you can employ is “Never go anywhere with anyone without permission.” No matter who asks them, unless they have permission from a trusted adult, children should NOT go. This clear-cut message helps to ensure your child will not be removed from your care by a stranger, neighbour, or estranged parent.
- Permission to go should be given by the current caretaker, such as a daycare worker or teacher. This assigns the judgement call to an adult, where it belongs.

Educate your children through courses or books. Our recommended resources:

- Child Safe Canada's Strangers and Dangers (ages 4–8) or Street Smarts (ages 6–11).
- *Protecting The Gift: Keeping Children and Teenagers Safe (and Parents Sane)*, by Gavin de Becker. This book offers a compelling look at how human predators select their targets and outlines how parents can protect their children.

“Prevention Is the Key to Safety”

Child Safe Canada
www.childsafecanada.com