

KEEPING OUR KIDS SAFE

by sally Burgess, Forefront Families

I cannot recall a time in my childhood when anyone told me anything about stranger danger, good touching and bad touching, keeping secrets or keeping myself safe from harm. I used to disappear with a friend on most Saturdays. I doubt that our parents knew where we were. They knew whom we were with and our general location, but that's it. We spent many hours swimming in creeks or exploring wooded areas on friends' farms without a thought in the world about our own safety. I am grateful that God's hand was on us and we are still here today to tell the tale!

Many would say that society now is very different than it was back then. With violent and sordid media content feeding receptive minds, human safety certainly is being jeopardized to a far greater extent than ever before. As parents, we are personally responsible for keeping our kids safe. I overheard a 17 year-old store assistant telling a friend that her parents didn't care where she was or what she was doing, as long as she was home by 11 p.m. How sad is that?

Kids can be exposed to harm both in and outside the home, and harm can be physical, sexual and emotional. I have already addressed physical harm to toddlers in a previous article (www.forefrontfamilies.org/content/view/129/10/). Kids who are at home alone need a list of safety tips to refer to. Things like - don't open the door to a stranger, or let anyone in the house without parental permission. Don't tell anyone you are home alone. If a door or window is open or broken, don't enter the house. Check that all doors and windows are locked after you enter the house. List the different kinds of emergencies and what to do about them. List emergency phone numbers including your address and phone number.

Develop a 'safe person phone list' that your child can choose a number from for the 'not so emergency' situations. Keep an emergency kit and show your kids what to do with the contents if they have to. A child's mind needs to be protected from inappropriate media and from stressful home conditions. Many a cruel word is spoken in anger and later regretted. However, the memory does not forget. Keep adult disagreements away from kids.

Explain to your children from an early age what good and bad touching means, and what good and bad secrets are. Make it clear that it doesn't matter who the person is, if it is bad touching or a bad secret, they need to tell a trusted adult. No adult needs to have a secret with a child. Watch out for changes in your child's moods. Keep open communication and encourage your child to talk about anything that is worrying them.

Tell your kids about transport safety. I just about freak out when I see kids jumping off the bus and running across the road without looking both ways. Don't take rides from anyone unless it has been OK'd with parents first. Walk with a friend, and if walking to or from school, take a safe public route. Park safety

means supervision of younger children at least up to 10 years old. Tell your kids not to play alone and to stay around the public playing area where other families are.

Insist that your kids tell you where they are going, who they are with, and give them a time to be home. If possible supply them with a cell phone so you can call one another. If you are shopping in a mall with young children, make sure they stay with you. Toddlers are far safer in strollers than running free. Note where you last saw a security guard. If someone asks for help, especially if it means going outside the mall, then refuse to do so. Be ready with car keys in hand when you leave the mall or store and make sure you constantly look around you.

Our kids rely on us for their safety. We need to make sure they know what danger is and what to do about it.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.