

Miss Katie's Kids Korner

Prevent Abductions

by Katie Taylor

As the weather gets warmer, and we get closer to the end of the school year, kids and parents alike tend to want to spend more time outdoors. After being cooped up for the long winter months, parents are more than happy to have their kids go outside to play. But are they safe? It's hard to imagine that even in Ellenville childhood abductions can happen. Here are a few ways to prevent the unthinkable, and be prepared if it does.

Parents are responsible for their children's safety. I was visiting a friend one Friday afternoon when her 14-year-old son breezed out the door with "I'm either going to be at the school playing ball, or at Richie's house, or in town getting ice cream." Without missing a beat, my friend replied: "This isn't multiple choice; where are you going to be?" He stopped, smiled, and said he would call from Richie's and tell her where they were headed.

Know where your kids are. Know their friends and their friend's addresses and phone numbers. Have them call you when they leave their primary location.

Keep your children with you in public places. For a toddler, this might mean placing him in a cart or stroller. Never leave a child unattended. If your child does become separated from you, teach him to go immediately to a salesperson and tell them he's lost. He should have the following information memorized: His/her full name; your name; home address; and phone number plus area code. When out in public, don't dress your child in clothing that displays his name; that includes, jackets, backpacks, and jerseys. When an adult addresses your child by name, even though a stranger, your child will think he knows them.

The majority of abductions occur close to home during the hours before or after school. There is no blueprint for a typical abductor; they look like everyone else. Statistics favor white males between the ages of 27 and 45 with their favorite targets being "tween-aged" girls. But predators come in all sexes, shapes, and sizes, and so do their targets.

For children, there is safety in numbers. Abductors prey on single children. If your child walks to school, have him/her walk in a group and stick to the most direct route. They should walk six feet away from the street and stay away from cars. Short cuts through abandoned parking lots and fields are not recommended even in a group and definitely not alone.

If your child is home alone for a few minutes, or a couple of hours, parents should instill the following rules:

- Never admit they are alone in the house – either on the phone or from behind a closed door.
- Never open the door to anyone even if

they are dressed like a delivery person.

- Never go out of the house unless a known adult picks them up, and you know where they are going to be.
- Have your child memorize your work/cell phone number in addition to their home phone.
- Have the phone numbers and addresses of family and friends written down in a special spot.
- When calling 911, leave the phone off the hook; it can be traced.

Because predators look like everyone else, they also act "nice" like everyone else. You've all told your child to never take candy from strangers, but predators know how to attract your child in other ways. Among them are: asking directions; asking to help him look for a lost pet; saying that mom and dad have been hurt. Often predators are someone your child sees every day. Because your child sees them, they think they know them. Be clear with your child about who can be trusted and who can't.

Have a code word that only you and your child know. Once your special code word has been established, if an adult comes up to him and doesn't know the code word, it's OK for him to say no, and to say it loudly. Teach your children to yell, "This is not my mother/father!" and "Help! I'm being kidnapped!" instead of just screaming. Onlookers tend to look away from an adult trying to control a screaming child, but will pay more attention if the child is specific.

Train your child to be observant. Become people watchers together and then have your child describe a stranger by asking specific questions: What was his race? Was it a man or a woman? What was he wearing? What color was his hair, short or long? Was he wearing glasses? Did he have any scars? Missing teeth, a mustache? How tall was he? How much did he weigh?

You can also play the game with vehicles. Again, be specific: What was the license plate # and what state was it from? What color was the vehicle? What was the body style (2-door, 4-door, sedan, wagon, truck)? Where did he see it and which way was it going? What did the driver look like? Was there anyone else in the car?

Here in Ellenville it is very unlikely your child will be abducted by a stranger (most abductions are connected with custody battles). Nevertheless, it's a good idea to have your child's photo and fingerprints on file at the police department. The *Ellenville Police Department's* "Operation ID" provides this service free of charge, and I highly recommend you take advantage of it. Now you're ready to go outside and enjoy the sunshine! 

*Katie Taylor teaches **Kindermusik**, a music and movement program for children birth through age 6, in Ellenville, Liberty, and Monticello. She is currently accepting applications for the summer session, which begins July 12. For more information, call 647-7291 or email ktyville@ulster.net.*

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