

Preventing child abduction

As a parent, you can do many things to make your child a difficult target for kidnappers and sexual predators. Here are age-appropriate suggestions from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and the Polly Klaas Foundation.

In addition, consider putting together a child identification kit that contains personally identifiable information, including photos, and update the information at least once a year.

A preschooler should

- always be under the direct supervision of an adult
- be taught his (her) full name, address, and phone number and how to dial 911
- if lost, seek assistance of a uniformed police officer, store cashier, or a woman with a child
- always ask your permission before accepting a gift or going somewhere with someone

A school-age child should

- never go anywhere unaccompanied and always use the buddy system
- let you know where he is and where he is going, and his approximate times of arrival and departure
- keep a safe distance (10 feet or more) from a car with someone in it, and never get into a car unless you have given permission to do so
- be informed that adults do not need to ask a child for directions or for help finding a lost animal or child
- never tell a phone caller that you aren't home or open the door if someone knocks if he is home alone. A latchkey child also needs to know who to call in an emergency
- scream "No" or say "Fire" when threatened. Such action immediately attracts attention and is an effective maneuver for thwarting an abductor
- if followed, run to a safe place, a store, or anywhere there are lots of people

A teenager should

- continue to use the buddy system when going anywhere and let you know where she is. (Consider providing a cell phone to a responsible teenager, to make it easier for her to communicate her whereabouts to you.)
- be made aware that drugs and alcohol impair judgment, rendering a person more susceptible to exploitation
- check out the house before entering when arriving home; lock the door behind her; and call you to let you know she has arrived
- never tell a phone caller that the parent is not home