

# Teaching Children to Avoid “Stranger Danger”



*As our preschoolers grow more independent, we still need to supervise them closely, but most of us also want to teach our children about dealing with strangers. Alerting children to “stranger danger” can both help them to be safe and reduce parents’ anxiety. How can we teach children to be wary of strangers but not to be overly fearful?*

## Tell her more than just “Don’t talk to strangers.” Teach which strangers are safe.

She may not understand that strangers look like the people she sees every day. She may also wonder why it’s all right to talk to a new teacher or neighbor—people who are strangers at first—and not to others. Police officers, firefighters, teachers, store clerks, or librarians are examples of safe strangers.

## Explain simple rules for staying safe.

Try practicing or role-playing situations involving the use of these rules with your child.

- “It’s okay to talk to someone if I’m with you or when I tell you it’s all right.”
- “Grown-ups who need help should ask other grown-ups, not children, for help. This includes carrying a package or finding a place or a lost puppy.”
- “Stay where you can see me or another grown-up with you in public places, such as stores or parks.”
- “If you’re not close to us, stay an arm’s length or more from someone you don’t know. Back up or run for help if an unfamiliar grown-up gets too close. Scream and kick if a stranger grabs you.”
- “If you get lost, find a police officer, security person, or store clerk. If separated from me or the grown-up you’re with in a public place, such as at a store or shopping mall, stay in that spot until someone finds you.”
- “Don’t go anywhere with someone you don’t know.”
- “Never take anything from a stranger.”
- “Listen to your feelings. If you’re scared, get away and look for someone to help you.”

## Read books on strangers with your children and talk about what you’ve read.

Your librarian can suggest titles, or you may want to consider these children’s books:

- “A Stranger in the Park” by Stuart Fitts and Donna Day Asay (1999)
- “Never Talk to Strangers” by Irma Joyce and George Buckett (2009)
- “Once Upon a Dragon: Stranger Safety for Kids (and Dragons)” by Jean E. Pendziwol and Martine Gourbault (2006)
- “The Berenstain Bears Learn About Strangers” by Stan and Jan Berenstain (1985)

## Read more on keeping your children safe.

“Personal Safety for Children: A Guide for Parents” is available online at [www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/safety/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/safety/index.html)

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