

# KEEPING KIDS SAFE

A PARENTS' GUIDE

The Archdiocese of Washington is dedicated to promoting and ensuring the protection of all children. This flier is one in a series produced by the archdiocese to help parents better understand how to protect their children from victimization, both inside and outside the home. This guide provides useful tips for keeping your children safe and the best way to talk to them about important safety issues.

## Always keep an up-to-date photo of your child

One of the most important tools for law enforcement in the case of a missing child is an up-to-date, good-quality photograph. The photograph should be a recent head-and-shoulders color photograph of the child in which the face is clearly seen. It should be of school-portrait quality, and the background should be plain or solid so it does not distract from the subject. When possible, the photograph should be in a digitized form and available electronically, as opposed to just a hard copy. The photograph should be updated at least every six months for children age six or younger, and then once a year, or when a child's appearance changes.

## Top 10 safety tips for parents

1. **Know where each of your children is at all times.** Know your children's friends and be clear with your children about the places and homes they may visit.
2. **Never leave children unattended in a vehicle,** whether it is running or not. Also remind children never to hitchhike, approach a vehicle or engage in a conversation with anyone in a vehicle they do not know or trust.
3. **Be involved in your children's activities.** You'll have a better opportunity to observe how the adults in charge interact with your children.
4. **Listen to your children.** Pay attention if they don't want to be with someone or go somewhere.
5. **Notice when anyone shows one or all of your children a great deal of attention or begins giving them gifts.** Talk to your children about the person and find out why that person is acting that way.
6. **Teach your children they have the right to say no** to any unwelcome, uncomfortable or confusing touch or actions by others and get out of those situations as quickly as possible. Teach them to loudly yell, "This person is not my father/mother/guardian" and tell you immediately if this happens.
7. **Be sensitive to any changes in your children's behavior or attitude.** Look and listen to small cues and clues indicating something may be troubling your children.
8. **Be sure to screen babysitters and caregivers.** Check the public registry for prior criminal records and sex offenses. Check references with other families who have used the caregiver and drop in unexpectedly to see how your children are doing.
9. **Practice basic safety skills with your children.** When out at a mall or park, have your children practice checking in with you, going to the restroom with a friend and locating adults who can help if they need assistance.
10. **Remember that there is no substitute for your attention and supervision.** Being available and taking time to really know and listen to your children helps build feelings of safety and security.



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### Top Safety Tips

### Talking to your children about safety

- Don't forget your older children — children age 11-17 are equally at risk of being victimized as younger children.
- Speak to your children in a calm, reassuring manner. They do not need to be frightened to get the point across.
- Speak openly about safety issues. If they feel you are comfortable discussing the subject matter, they may be more forthcoming to you.
- Do not confuse children with the concept of "strangers." Children do not have the same understanding of who a stranger is as an adult might and danger to children is often much greater from someone they or you know.
- Find opportunities to practice "what if" scenarios to ensure your children understand what to do in different situations.
- Teach your children it is more important to get out of a threatening situation than it is to be polite.



### Tell your child:

- To always check with you or a trusted adult before going anywhere, accepting anything or getting in a car with anyone. This applies to older children as well.
- To always take a friend when they go places or play outside.
- It's okay to say no if someone tries to touch them or treats them in a way that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable or confused.
- They have the right to be safe. When needing help, they should keep asking until they get the help they need.

### The biggest myth...

**Dangers from strangers** is the biggest myth in child safety. In most cases, the perpetrator is someone the parents/guardians or children know, and this person may be in a position of trust or responsibility to a child and family.

### How to check for registered offenders in your area

Find out if there are registered sex offenders living in your neighborhood, community or near your child's school or daycare by searching the state or national sex offender registries online.

#### In Maryland:

[www.dpscs.state.md.us/sorSearch/](http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/sorSearch/)

#### In the District of Columbia:

[sexoffender.dc.gov](http://sexoffender.dc.gov)

#### Nationwide:

[www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov)

Registries in Maryland and D.C. allow users to see where offenders live on an interactive map.

### By the numbers

The U.S. Department of Justice reports:

- **797,500** children younger than 18 were reported missing in a one-year period of time
- **2,185** children on average were reported missing each day
- **203,900** children were abducted by family members
- **58,200** children were abducted by non-family members
- **115 children** were the victim of stereotypical kidnappings, where a child is abducted by someone they don't know who holds the child overnight, transports the child 50 miles or more, kills the child, demands ransom or intends to keep the child permanently
- **1 in 5** girls and **1 in 10** boys will be sexually victimized before adulthood
- **1 in 7** children online aged 10-17 receive a sexual solicitation over the internet