



# Frank Talk With Kerstine Franklin

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One of the biggest concerns for a parent is knowing how to protect our children. The following article has been reprinted from the National

Center for Victims of Crime. Today's section is Part Two, and the remainder will be in our next newsletter.

## **Safety Tips for Parents**

### **Keep Records**

- Keep a complete and updated written description of your child which includes eye color, hair color, height, weight, date of birth and any unique physical attributes. Include information about glasses, braces, pierced ears and any birthmarks, scars or blemishes.
- Take color photographs of your child every six months that are in good focus.
- Make sure that your dentist has on file up-to-date dental charts and x-rays for your child. If you move, get a copy of these records to take with you.
- Know where your child's medical records are kept.
- Have your child fingerprinted by your local police department. Fingerprint accuracy is important, so always have them done by a professional. Keep a copy of the prints in a safe place. (Going to the police station does not have to be frightening for a child. It can be presented as a fun outing and done with friends.)
- Maintain current addresses and telephone numbers of your child's friends and schools.

### **Avoiding Abduction**

- Teach your child the tricks people sometimes use to interest children, such as: offering a ride in bad weather; offering candy or money; asking for help looking for a lost pet; or saying that "your Mommy or Daddy sent me to pick you up." It is important to teach your child that it is not bad behavior to say "no" to someone who asks for help. Talk over alternatives (like calling 911) if someone is hurt.
- Instead of warning your child not to "talk to strangers," explain specific situations that might happen and what your child can do in those situations. Children may not have an understanding of what "stranger" means; for instance, some children think that someone who takes the time to befriend them is not a stranger. This also helps children to understand that certain behaviors are wrong no matter who does them--remember people your child knows are much more likely to harm them than "strangers."
- Teach your child never to go anywhere with someone he or she doesn't know. Also teach your child never to go anywhere with someone he or she does know (such as a teacher, bus driver, neighbor, church official or member, etc.), unless your child heard directly from you that it is

okay to go. Explain that sometimes people will say that you sent them or that you are hurt as a trick.

- Role play situations with your child so they can practice saying "NO" and avoiding dangerous situations. Talk about how hard it can be to say no to an adult, especially if the adult is asking for help or offering something fun to the child.
- Don't put your child's name on any of his or her clothing, school supplies or school bags. A stranger might use your child's name as a way of suggesting that she or he knows your child or you.
- Walk your neighborhood with your child and pick out the safest routes to school, friends' houses or other places your child walks. Identify with your child safe places to go in an emergency, such as a trusted neighbor, open business or fire station.
- Some communities have a "Safe Haven" program, where businesses encourage lost or frightened children to come inside for help. If your community doesn't have such a program, contact your local law enforcement agency about starting one.
- Consider having your child take a self-defence class or study karate. A child can learn ways to react if she or he is ever attacked. A child can surprise an attacker by physically resisting and hurting an attacker in a vulnerable area which allows valuable time to run away. Knowledge of self-defense or martial arts can increase a child's self-confidence, which may make a person think twice about attempting to harm your child.
- Teach your child what to do if he or she gets separated from you at a store or other public place. Don't leave your child alone. Never leave your child in the car, even if you are "just running in." In addition to kidnapers, carjackers are a threat to your child in this case.
- Keep an eye on your child. Be especially careful at places where you might get distracted, such as at an ATM or with the cashier in a store.
- Your child also needs to know which strangers can be helpful, such as a police officer, fire fighter, store clerk or cashier.

### **Child Sexual Abuse**

- The most important sexual abuse prevention strategy is good communication with your child. Take the time every day to talk with your child, and make sure that you can really listen and observe your child while he or she talks. Learn about your child's activities, but also about his or her feelings. Encourage your child to always share his or her problems and concerns with you.
- Talk to your child about sexual abuse. Always mention people the child knows as well as strangers. (Remember

your child is about four times more likely to be sexually abused by someone she or he knows than by a stranger!) This can increase your child's safety because it is easier for your child to respond to something she or he knows can happen, and it will definitely help your child to talk with you if anything ever happens. Try including this topic in discussions you have about other risks your child may face (such as crossing busy streets, fire safety, or what to do if lost).

Reassure your child by emphasizing that the vast majority of adults never do bad things to children and that most adults want to protect children from harm.

- Use the proper words for sex organs, such as penis and vagina. It is hard for a child to talk openly about sexual abuse if she or he doesn't have the words or has been taught that parts of the body are dirty or bad.
- Explain that some areas of your body--the parts your bathing suit covers--are private, and no older person should touch them, except a doctor when you are in the room with them. One way to approach what "private" means is to use things that belong to your child, such as toys, books, bed -- anything of your child's someone else should ask permission to touch or use.
- Suggest solutions to your child, such as: "If someone touches you in a way that feels uncomfortable, tell them to stop. If someone pretends that touching you was an accident, move away or firmly take the person's hand off of you."
- Be specific. Tell your child that an adult or older child should NEVER:
  - Put their hands down your pants or up your skirt.
  - Touch your private parts, even through clothes or pajamas.
  - Ask you to touch their private parts, or ask you to remove their clothes.
  - Take off your clothes.
  - Take pictures of you with your clothes off.
  - Take their clothes off in front of you.
- Most parents try to teach their children to listen to adults and to "do as they are told." Teach your child that there are times that it is okay to say "no" to an adult, and that you will support your child when she or he does so. Even things that seem harmless, like making your child kiss a relative goodbye, can make a child more vulnerable to sexual assault.
- Teach your child that they can always say "no" to someone who wants to touch or hug them-- even to you. Practice with your child ways of saying "no" that feel comfortable in various situations.
- Be on the lookout for signs that something is wrong. If your child says she or he doesn't like someone or shows reluctance or discomfort around an adult or teenager, ask why. Ask if the person has done something to make him or her uncomfortable. A sexually abused child may show un-

usual interest in sexuality, or may exhibit changes in behavior such as becoming withdrawn or violent.

- Ask your child to tell you if someone touches them in a way that makes them feel funny. Explain that the person may ask a child to promise not to tell or may threaten the child. A child may be told something terrible will happen (such as their Mom or Dad will be killed) if she or he tells anyone about the abuse. Ask your child to report any time an older child or adult asks them to keep a secret.

#### **IF YOUR CHILD BECOMES A VICTIM OF CRIME**

- Believe him or her. Many children who tell adults about crimes are afraid they will not be believed. Many aren't. Be sure to take your child seriously, even if a violent crime was not committed.
- Reassure the child that what happened is not his or her fault. A child who was hurt or accosted while breaking a rule (such as being somewhere you said they were not allowed to go) may be especially afraid that you will be upset with him or her.
- Immediately get him or her any needed medical attention. In the case of a sexual assault, an injury might not be obvious, and a medical exam is needed to detect internal injuries and screen for possible exposure to disease or infection.
- Try to temper your own reaction. Your child is likely to become very upset if she or he sees that you are upset. They may also think that they did something wrong and take responsibility for your pain. They may decide it is better not to keep talking to you if you exhibit extreme emotions.
- Trying to pretend something didn't happen or telling your child to "just forget about it" will not help. Both you and your child will experience stress related to the crime, whether or not you acknowledge it. The best way to cope with the problem is to talk, listen and get support.
- Do not try to take the law into your hands. Your child needs you, and needs to try to get back some normalcy in his or her life. If you try to harm someone who has hurt your child, you could be arrested and even go to jail. Your child must then cope with this added trauma.
- Report the crime -- even a suspected crime -- to the police.
- Get support. Contact a local crime victim agency or child advocacy center. They can offer you and your child support and important information about your rights. Don't try to handle this alone. There are many organizations that can help you.
- Your local phone book, law enforcement agency, or hospital can help you find local services.

Please visit [www.darkness2light.org](http://www.darkness2light.org) for more resources  
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