



Cornell University
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Our Children's Safety is No Laughing Matter

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Clowns! Growing up, clowns were a source of fun, excitement, and entertainment. Today, it seems clowns have become a source of anxiety and fear. As more and more of these stories surface and are shown through news outlets, captured on social media, and talked about at school and on the bus, we as parents must remain calm and teach our children how to handle dangerous situations should they ever find themselves in one.

One of our main responsibilities as parents is to provide a safe environment for our children. This is not only at home, but also means we need to make sure they have a safe environment wherever they go. We can do this by preparing them, but also not scaring them about these situations in the news.

American Kang Duk Won, a martial arts organization with classes in New York State, Ohio, and Canada, advises parents to involve their children in martial arts training. Through training, whether with American Kang Duk Won or another school, students will develop a foundation of self-confidence that includes self-defense. They will also learn the elements of self-defense. By building a foundation of self-defense, children will be more prepared should they encounter a dangerous situation. Instructors with AKDW advise parents to know where your kids are going. Have them check in if plans change. Continued communication will add to their safety.

Children can become relaxed and predictable in their behavior and this makes them become easy targets. Predators look for the kids who are not aware of their surroundings and who do not look confident. Teach our children to walk with confidence when they are in public. Have their head up and pay attention to where they are going. Put your cell phone away and wait until you are at your destination to check that text message. By acting positive and being aware you make yourself less of a target for a harmful situation. We want to also instruct our children to avoid possible dangerous situations. If we are in a rush we tend to try to take the short cut. By taking this short cut we can sometimes put ourselves in danger. Teach your children to do a scan of the area. Are there things that seem out of the ordinary or strange? If you see something, Don't Risk It! Do not put yourself into a

dangerous situation. If you find something strange in your scan, leave the situation and find a trusted adult; a police officer, a teacher, or a neighbor, and notify them of the strange activity. Never put yourself back into that situation. Get out of the place you are in. Tell our children that their safety is the most important thing in these situations; that they do not need to get all the information they can, they do not need to risk their safety for a license plate number.

Cornell Cooperative Extension teaches parents to set rules and limits that are age appropriate. It is also important to have rules for outside of the home. Have clear rules for your children of where they may play in your neighborhood and how often they need to check in with you. We also need to make sure to teach our children the difference between a casual, friendly “hello” from someone in the grocery store and someone that may pose a threat. Rules are important and we need to remember that children may forget them from time to time so we need to refresh their memory before they head off to play with a friend.

The New York State Police gives this advice on their website:

- Trust your instincts
- Stay calm, composed, and alert when posed with a dangerous situation
- If you are in a dangerous situation, look for an opportunity to get away
- Use your brain and ask yourself, why is this person talking to me?
- Children are most vulnerable when they are alone, sad, or curious. Don't be an easy target.
- Keep your distance from a stranger, using a “safety zone”
- Never go with someone you don't know if they tell you there is a family emergency. Set up a code word for these situations.

In addition to teaching our children how to be safe at a park, at school, or out in public, we need to also focus on keeping our children safe online. Many predators are using social media outlets for making contact with children and teenagers. Parents must be aware of this potential dangerous situation. Cooperative Extension advises the following tips for keeping our children safe in the cyber world:

- Get access to parental block software which limits a child from exploring an inappropriate site
- Keep computers in a central location in the home
- Set data limits of a teen's cell phone and set a time for daily usage to stop
- Negotiate rules for teen cell phone use
- Make sure you have passwords to social media accounts, email accounts, and cell phone
- Have your teen “friend” you on their social media accounts so you can see what they are posting
- Discuss what is appropriate to post on these accounts
- Follow social media outlets rules and policies for age usage
- Educate your child/teen about potential dangers in cyber communication
- Teach children and teens to never give out personal information online
- Never meet someone in person that you met online without discussing it with your parents

Safety is important for parents to teach to children because our children do not always think in these ways. We need to make sure that our children know that they do not have to be scared because of the things they may be seeing on the news, but they do have to be prepared, cautious, and aware.