

# Pointers For Parents

## Stranger-Danger Warnings Don't Keep Kids Safer

(NAPSA)—“Stranger danger” is a phrase we hear often, but it is not an effective safety message for children. Child advocates point to incidents where lost children hid from rescuers because they were “strangers” or willingly walked away with someone who didn’t fit their idea of a “stranger.”

“Teaching your children to watch out for bad-looking strangers is not going to keep them safer,” said Nancy A. McBride, national safety director for the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC).

Most children find the stranger-danger message confusing. When asked, children will often describe a “stranger” as someone who is ugly or mean. They don’t think nice-looking or friendly people are “strangers.” If someone talks to a child or is around a child more than once, that person loses his or her “stranger” status. The child then thinks he or she “knows” the person.

NCMEC recommends that you teach your child to check first with a trusted adult, take a friend along, and learn how to avoid and get out of dangerous situations.

Practice “what if” scenarios with your children. Reinforce these skills during a trip to the mall or park. Reassure your children that you are there for them, and remind them that there are other people who can help.

If your children are lost, they may be surrounded by many “strangers” who can help them if they ask. “We need to give children safety nets of people they can go to if they need help,” said McBride. “That may include uniformed law-



**When talking to your children about personal safety on the way to and from school, avoid using “stranger danger.”**

enforcement or security officers, a salesperson with a nametag, an information booth clerk at a mall, or a mother with children.”

If children are lost outside, they should never wander away from where they first became lost. If that place becomes too dangerous because of severe weather or another threatening situation, children should go to the nearest safe spot and wait. They should make noise by yelling, blowing a whistle, or otherwise attracting attention. This will help bring someone to their rescue.

“Now is the time to retire the ‘stranger-danger’ message,” said McBride. “We need to empower our children with the tools they need to keep themselves safer and make sure trusted adults are there to supervise and protect them.”

For more safety information and free publications in English or Spanish, go to [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) or call NCMEC’s 24-hour toll-free hotline at 1.800.THE.LOST (1.800.843.5678).