

Protecting Our *Children*

How To Help Keep Your Child Safer Going To And From School

(NAPSA)—You've reminded your children about how to cross the street safely or climb onto the school bus with care, but when you talk with them about personal safety, what do you tell them?

"Teaching your children to watch out for bad-looking 'strangers' is not going to keep them safer," says 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 approaching them to ask for directions or talking to them at the bus stop are "strangers."

Yet a common technique used in attempted and actual child abductions is an adult approaching a child for directions, asking for help or offering a ride.

While it is not helpful to teach your child to fear every unknown adult who walks up, McBride says it is important for parents and guardians to discuss with their children how to identify potentially dangerous situations and to avoid them.

If someone tries to grab your child, he or she should make a commotion and draw attention by kicking or yelling loudly "this person is not my mother/father/guardian." Getting the attention of passersby may impede an attempted abduction.

When talking with your child about safety, NCMEC recom-



It's important to talk with your children about how to stay safer when they are going to school and coming home.

mends that you teach your child to check first with a trusted adult, take a friend along and learn how to recognize and avoid dangerous situations.

Practice "what if" scenarios with your children. Reinforce these skills while walking to the bus stop or going to school. Reassure your children that you are there for them and remind them that there are other people who can help, and assist them in identifying who those people are.

"An important point to remember is that nothing beats your attention to your children," said McBride. "We need to empower our children with tools to help keep themselves safer. They need to know that trusted adults are there to supervise and help protect them."

For more safety information and free publications in English or Spanish, go to www.missingkids.com or call NCMEC's 24-hour toll-free hotline at (800) THE-LOST [1 (800) 843-5678].