



"Stranger Danger"

What to Teach Your Children About Strangers and When to Do It!

When and how do you teach your child about strangers? This depends on your child and how much they understand. If your child at 2 or 2 ½ understands and you want to start introducing some ideas and advice, that is great but you don't have to force it. If by 3 years old your child has not demonstrated their own interest or curiosity then you should definitely initiate the conversations.

It is hard to balance telling your child *too much* or *too little*. You don't want to scare him or her but you want them to have enough information to be protected. These are hard conversations to have but there is a place in-between where both you and your child will be comfortable. Start slowly and sensitively and you will be fine!

When you begin conversations about strangers, start by teaching your child their complete address, city, state, and phone number. If they only know the street name this may not be helpful. Also, talk to your child about 911 - what it is used for, why you would call them, and what to say.

Next, you need to teach your child about safe people. You can talk to them about this while out shopping. Explain to them how to find a police officers or security guard (where to look, how to ask for help, etc). Explain to them that they can ask cashiers or staff who work in a store for help if needed. Show them how to get help if they were ever lost or couldn't find you. If you need to, make a game out of this process and focus on the positive reasons for doing this and why it's important for you child to obey rules.

Another way to talk about safe people is to take a walk around your neighborhood with your child. Talk about which houses are safe if they needed to go to one and then show them how to knock on the door. Tell the neighbor what you are doing so your child feels comfortable with them and the process.

There is so much to cover; however you want to give your child *just* enough information to keep them safe but not so much that they are overwhelmed. Other areas you can discuss with your child include instructing them not to go up to anyone they don't know even if they say, "do you want to pet my puppy," etc. Giving your child a code word or name and changing the word or name often helps too. If a person does not know the secret code, instruct your child not to go with that person. Children talk a lot and might tell people their code name, so changing it often helps.

It is a good idea to fill out an identification kit on each of your children. Update the information yearly on their birthday or when you change the clocks or batteries in your smoke detectors – whatever works best to help remind you to do it every year! If you make this a routine it will become second nature. It will keep your child safe and you will feel better. You can download a free child safety kit at www.amberalertgps.com.