

## Start with the basics

- Rehearse with your child his or her full name, address, and phone number, including area code, and how to make emergency phone calls from home and public phones. Practice on an unplugged phone.
- Teach your child to go to a store clerk or security guard and ask for help if you become separated in a store or shopping mall. Tell them never to go into the parking lot alone. And, when possible, accompany your child to the restroom.
- Tell your child to never accept gifts or rides from someone he or she does not know. Your child should never go anywhere with a stranger, even one who says that you have sent them. Adopt a family code word to be used if you have to ask a third party to pick up your child. And, make sure your child knows to never, ever hitchhike!
- Teach your children that no one, not even someone they know, has the right to touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. Tell them they have the right to say “No” to an adult in this situation.

## At school or at play

- Walk the neighborhood with your child. Pick out the safest route to school and friends houses. Avoid danger spots like alleys and wooded areas. Identify safe places to go in an emergency, like a neighbor’s house, a block parent, McGruff House, or an open store.
- Encourage your child to walk and play with friends, not alone, and to stay in well-lighted,

open areas where others can see them. Teach your child to walk confidently and stay alert to what’s going on.

- Don’t hang a house key around your child’s neck. It’s a telltale sign that you will not be home when they return from school. Put the key inside a pocket or sock.
- Encourage your child to look out for other kids’ safety and to stay away from strangers who hang around playgrounds, public restrooms, and empty buildings. A stranger is someone the child does not know well. Teach our child to remember and report to you the license numbers of people who offer rides, hand around playgrounds, or appear to follow them. If a stranger tries to follow or grab your child, teach him or her to scream “Stay away from me” or “This person is trying to hurt me”, and run to the nearest place where people are around.

## At home alone

- Make sure your child can reach you by telephone, wherever you are. Have your child check in with you at work or with a neighbor when he or she gets home.
- Caution your child about answering the phone and accidentally letting a stranger know that he or she is alone. The child should say that parents are busy and take a message.
- Post important phone numbers near all of your home phones. Numbers should include: Police, Fire Department, Emergency, Poison Control Center, Mom or Dad at work, and neighbor.
- Agree on rules for having friends over or going to someone else’s house when no adult is present.
- Work out an escape plan in case of fire.

- Tell your child never to open the door to a stranger when alone at home. (Consider the height of your child when installing a peep hole in your front door.) Teach your child how to work door and window locks and make sure to use them.
- Discuss fun things to do while home alone. For example: feed pets, read books, or write a letter to a friend or relative.

## Child Abuse

- At least 100,000 children are reported as victims of sexual abuse each year, and experts say the actual number is much higher. It is especially difficult to detect child abuse because the abuser is often a parent, relative, babysitter, or close family friend. Children may not recognize it when it happens or know it is wrong.
- Encourage your children to always talk with you when someone has abused them.
- Be alert for physical and behavioral changes that might signal child sexual abuse. Some physical signs are bruises and scars, bedwetting, loss of appetite, nightmares, venereal disease, and pain or irritation around the genital area. Behavioral symptoms may include refusing to go to school or to be alone, increased anxiety or immature behavior, artwork that depicts strange sexual or physical overtones, and a change in attitude toward a relative, neighbor, or babysitter.
- If your child has been abused, report to the police and child protection agency. You may save other children from being harmed. Seek counseling for your child from a community mental health, child welfare, or child abuse treatment center.

## Tips On Choosing Day Care Centers/Babysitters

- Find out as much as you can about the caretaker's reputation and whether there have been any complaints in the past. Is the caretaker licensed or regulated in any way? What are their qualifications? Have background checks been made? Have you asked for and checked references?
- Drop in unannounced, periodically, to ensure that the quality of care meets your standards. Observe how the children relate to the caretaker(s).
- Ask about the philosophy and practice of discipline.
- Make sure there is ongoing parent involvement. Compare notes with other parents. And, most important, talk with your child daily about how things are going and investigate problems that worry you or become chronic.

## Helpful Community Resources

- Your community may have a McGruff House--an adult-supervised, temporary safe haven for children who may face an emergency such as being bullied, followed, or hurt while walking or playing in the neighborhood. Check with your parent/teacher group or law enforcement agency. Or, inquire about starting your own McGruff House.
- Schools, recreation departments, churches, or community organizations like the Boys Clubs or YMCA/YWCA sponsor afterschool programs for elementary school children and "drop-in" centers for teens.
- And, most important, you are a vital community resource.



## What you can do to help

- Volunteer to help as a block parent or a McGruff House. Or help out at a McGruff House by volunteering to make phone calls or organize publicity.
- If your child's school doesn't include crime and drug abuse prevention in its curriculum, work with the parents' association, teachers' groups, and law enforcement officials to change the situation.
- Invite the local crime prevention officer to talk about children's safety to a neighborhood meeting of parents and children or talk to kids in school about keeping safe and looking out for friends.
- Serve as an advocate for sensitive treatment of child victims, for adequate regulation of child care, and for programs that work to keep kids safe and help kids keep themselves safe.

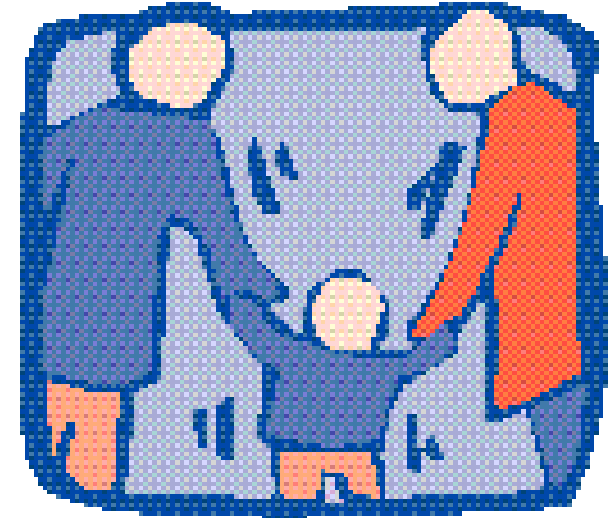
## Clearwater Police Department

645 Pierce Street  
Clearwater, Florida 33756



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# Keeping Kids Safe



# Kids Keeping Safe

## WOULD YOUR CHILD KNOW WHAT TO DO IF...

*He or she got lost in a shopping mall?*

*A nice, friendly stranger offered him or her a ride?*

*A babysitter wanted to play a secret game that no one would know about?*

*A friend dared him or her to hitchhike?*