

Stranger in disguise

Reader's Letter

"My seven year old son was explained at school how careful he should be with strangers. I'm not sure what exactly he was told, but now he seems to be confused and scared of everybody... Even for adults it is not easy in the modern society to stay alert without becoming paranoid... How can we make children aware of dangers, without making them worried more than necessary?"

Claire M. Didsbury

M&D Comments

At Mums & Dads we know that as a parent you can never win. You want your children to be protected, but independent, careful but friendly, to learn but not to make mistakes... All we can rely on is our own common sense, knowledge and experience. We hope that these two articles will help you in their different ways. One by explaining what to be aware of and whom to be careful with. Another by suggesting whom to trust and where to go for help.

Master Wayne Edwards from Chorlton Black Belt Academy, martial arts school in South Manchester, feels that their programme is not just about punching and kicking, but about keeping children safe in all walks of life. "We teach your child how to recognise stranger's tactics and how to deal with situations if confronted," says Wayne. He divided dangerous strangers into 10 categories.

Gift giver. A stranger that tempts children to go with him/her through gifts or promises of gifts such as sweets, etc.

Friendly. This type of stranger attempts to gain children's trust through putting on a friendly persona to attract them.

Game Player. A stranger that attempts to gain a child's trust through pretending to play games. Usually they will encourage the child to keep secrets.

Helpless. By appearing to need help a stranger can lure a child to close proximity, they may even ask for help.

Familiar. A familiar can be a next-door neighbour, storekeeper, school caretaker, etc. This type of stranger could use the fact that he/she is familiar to the child to get close.

Messenger. A stranger who tries to trick a child to accompany him/her under the guise of being asked to collect the child or having some important information that can only be passed on in private.

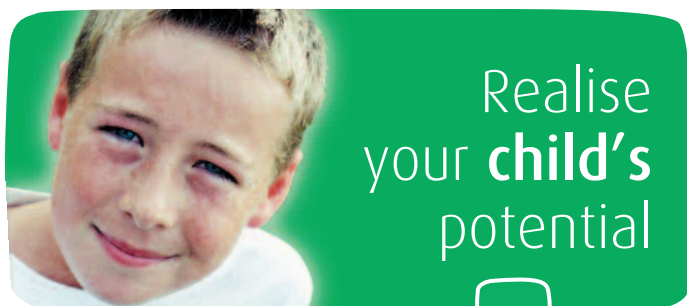
Mind reader. This stranger can gain a child's confidence because he/she appears to the child as knowing a lot. Mind reader may know the child's name, what school the child goes to, parent's names, their hobbies etc. The Mind reader has usually studied his/her prey before making a move. A child can be impressed by their knowledge.

Promiser. This stranger will make promises of a fun time if the child goes with him/her.

Cool. A stranger that demonstrates traits that children wish to emulate and will use this to attract the child.

Scary. A stranger may use to their own ends the fact that children are taught to respect their elders. A stranger can use direct tactics to force children to go with him/her by barking out an order, for example: 'Get here now!' n

If you'd like to know more about Chorlton Black Belt Academy, or are interested in joining their classes call 01298 74038 or visit www.chorltonbba.com



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Stranger child's eye view

A child getting lost is a parent's worst nightmare. Even more terrifying is the thought that a child might be abducted. As parental fears about child safety reach epidemic proportions, Child's Eye Media, the company that specialises in making documentaries for young children, and a Manchester Police Officer Helena Hodgson, have launched a new safety campaign.

The Safer Strangers, Safer Buildings campaign is designed for children who get lost, or feel unsafe. The initiative gives children commonsense guidance and support to help them to identify trustworthy adults to approach and the kinds of buildings to go into to ask for help.

Linda Mort, early years specialist from *Child's Eye Media*, offers M&D readers a 'safer strangers, safer buildings' code, which can be

used to help children keep safe. The article below is addressed to children as well as parents.

Who a stranger is?

A stranger can be described as someone that we don't know or someone that we don't know well. You can say that because we don't know the person we don't know whether they are kind or not. Most people are kind but there are a small number of people who are not. We cannot tell who is kind just by looking at them. We must never go anywhere with a stranger or do anything for a stranger. It doesn't matter what they say to us, we should always tell the grown-up who looks after us if a stranger talks to us.

Who a safer stranger is?

A safer stranger is a person who is working at their job which

helps people. Safer strangers will usually be wearing a uniform. Safer strangers could be police officers, police community support officers, traffic wardens, shopkeepers, check-out assistants, paramedics and others.

What safer buildings are?

Safer buildings could be banks, post offices, libraries, medical centres, shops, supermarkets, leisure centres and others.

What to do if you get lost?

If you get lost, or feel unsafe, and there is no adult around that you know and trust, look for a safer stranger who you can ask for help. If you can't see a safer stranger outside, look for a safer building you can go in to, to ask for help from the people who work there.

Tell the safer stranger your name. Also, if you can, tell them the phone number of your parent or

the person who looks after you.

Notes for parents

Help your child come to assimilate the *Safer Strangers, Safer Buildings* code gradually, so that it eventually becomes 'second nature'. Talk about it in a low-key, matter-of-fact way, whenever the opportunity arises naturally. Discuss how they might put the code into practice. For example, if they get lost in a shopping centre, talk about how they could go into a shop and find the uniformed person at the till. If they are in a cinema, they should go to the ticket office to ask for help. When you judge the time is right for your child, let them walk short distances with friends, to begin with. Gradually extend the routes and areas, going on 'dummy runs' together first. The phrase 'stranger danger' can make children fearful of all strangers. The phrase 'safer strangers, safer buildings' is a positive alternative, giving children an immediate strategy.

Child's Eye Media new documentary 'Teigan gets lost' is available to view on their website free of charge, for the benefit of children and their parents, carers and teachers at www.childseyemedia.com/safety.html 