

Personal Safety

Protect Yourself

In a dangerous situation, it is important to consider your own safety first. There are several things that you can do to help keep yourself safe.

- Always be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Always walk in well-lit areas and walk assertively.
- Avoid dark sidewalks and areas.
- Always trust your instincts; if someone or something makes you uneasy, leave immediately.
- Avoid walking close to recessed doorways when walking down the sidewalk at night.
- If someone in a vehicle stops to ask for directions, answer from a distance. If the vehicle follows you, turn around and walk in the opposite direction- the vehicle will have to reverse directions in order to keep you in sight.
- Do not fill your arms with packages, keep an arm and one hand free whenever possible.
- Travel with a companion or in groups when out of town or in unfamiliar neighborhoods and settings.
- At home keep doors and windows locked at all times. Do not hide a spare key outside for a criminal to find.
- Do not open the door to a stranger.
- If you are attacked- talk with the attacker to show sympathy, deal with him/her as a person; force the attacker to see you as a person and not an object.

- Pretend to faint or vomit. If anything you do or say makes the attacker more violent - stop doing it!

- Last resort- physical resistance. Struggle/fight back. Vulnerable areas to strike are the groin, eyes, Adam's apple, nose...Pulling back on the little finger and kicking the shins can also be effective. Do not try to defeat the attacker- just break free and run! Scream/make noise. When using this option yell "FIRE" instead of help.

- If someone tries to rob you, do not resist. It is more important to give up your property than your life. Report the crime immediately to the police. Try to describe the attacker as accurately as possible; your actions could prevent a subsequent crime.

Protect Your Child

- Your child cannot tell the difference between strangers who are not dangerous, and those that are. Children possess a natural ability to trust people, so you must teach them to exercise caution in these situations.

- Your child should know his full name, address, and phone number, including area code, before going to kindergarten. He should also know how to use a public phone, and how to dial "911" and "0" in an emergency.

- Teach your child that although it is not all right to talk to strangers, it is okay to go to a police officer, security guard, or store clerk if he needs help.

- Let your child know that it is never okay to accept rides or gifts from someone that he does not know.

- Teach your child to follow his instincts, and leave immediately if the situation does not seem right.

- Make sure that he always walks and plays with friends, never by himself.

- If your child has to be home alone after school, make sure that he notifies you or a neighbor when he gets home. Leave a phone number where you can be reached, along with numbers for neighbors and emergencies including police, fire, paramedics, and the poison control center.

- Make sure that your child knows not to let anyone in the house without your permission, and to never let a caller at the door or on the phone know that there is not an adult at home. Teach him to say that his parents are busy and take a message.

- Always know where your child is, and whom he is with.

- Make sure that your child knows where the safe places are to go if he feels threatened when walking or riding his bicycle.

- Teach your child to run away immediately if a stranger stops to ask for directions or assistance. Make sure that your child knows that it is never acceptable to take candy, toys, gifts, or anything else offered to him by a stranger.

- Keep current identification information about your child in a safe and accessible place. Include fingerprints, video, photo, and physical description.

- Know how to obtain your child's dental x-rays and medical records.

- Never leave your child unattended in a public place.

- Always check the references of daycares, preschools, and babysitters before leaving your child with them.

Protect Your Identity

According to CUNA mutual group, one out of four people in the United States has had their identity stolen. With the wealth of information available to everyone these days, identity theft has become a growing concern.

- Never reveal any personally identifying information on the phone, through the mail or over the Internet unless you have initiated the contact or know whom you are dealing with.

- Put passwords on your credit card, bank and phone accounts. Avoid using easily available information like your mother's maiden name, your birth date, the last four digits of your SSN or your phone number, or a series of consecutive numbers.

- Guard your mail from theft. Deposit outgoing mail in post office collection boxes or at your local post office. Remove mail from your mailbox after it has been delivered.

- Pay attention to your billing cycles. Follow up with creditors if your bills do not arrive on time.

- Never write your PIN on your ATM or long distance calling card, or on a piece of paper in your wallet. Memorize it instead.

- When using the ATM machine, always position your body so that observers are prevented from seeing your PIN. Remove the cash immediately, along with your card and receipt. Take it to an isolated area where you are safe to count your cash.

- Never leave your receipt in the ATM machine. People can use it to access your account number.

- Never give out your credit card number unless it is for a reservation or purchase you have initiated.

- Destroy all carbons and keep all charge slips in a safe place.

■ Report any lost or stolen cards immediately. Monitor your child's use of the Internet. There are sites that will make inquiries regarding everything from your child's age to your spending habits, and your child may unknowingly give away that information.

■ Always use a secure browser that will encrypt or scramble purchase information when you shop online. If you do not have these capabilities, consider calling the company, faxing your order, or paying with a check.

■ If an online situation seems at all unsafe, leave the site immediately, and teach your child to do the same.

Sources:

The National Crime Prevention Council

The Federal Trade Commission

The Los Angeles Police Department

The Polly Klaas Foundation