

Summer Fun Safety Tips

By Pattie Fitzgerald, Founder of Safely Ever After, Inc.

Summertime... and the livin' is easy... Isn't that how the song goes?

Why then, does it seem like summertime is sometimes even more hectic than our school days: the vacations, camps, endless backyard bar-b-ques, swim parties, and outings! With all this running around, travel and daytrips how do we make sure our kids stay safe – especially when we aren't always around keeping a watchful eye?

At several of my workshops last month, parents often had the same concerns and questions as they geared up for their summer holidays. “What if my child gets lost at Disneyland?” “How can my kids protect themselves if we're not on every outing with them?”

Let's face it, we aren't always going to be right there next to our kids as they venture out this summer. That's why it's so important that we arm them with some important safety skills and reminders this season.

Unfortunately, relying solely on the outdated & ineffective “don't talk to strangers” just doesn't cut it anymore. In fact, it can be misleading to a child.

Reality check #1: Kids don't have the same concept as we do when it comes to “who's a stranger” ... which means that any smiling person who introduces himself to a child, offering an enticing lure or interesting premise, may be able to trick a child into leaving with him.

Reality check #2: The truth is that sometimes, in an emergency, children may need to ask a “safe-stranger” like a Mom With Kids for help.

Here are some good safety tips for parents and kids this summer -- whether you're at Disneyland, camp, or even your local beach!

Summer Safety Tips!

- 1. Talk to your kids before the outing. The rule is that you must always be able to SEE THEM and they must always be able to SEE YOU. Simply put, no wandering around without mom/dad/camp counselor, etc.**
- 2. Use the TWO GIANTS STEPS RULE. Kids can never be more than two giant steps away from you or the adult in charge. (Play this game throughout the outing. It's a fun way for young children to remember not to roam.)**
- 3. On family outings, have the kids take turns doing a "kid-count" after each ride, activity, or periodically during a hike or walk. This keeps everyone on their toes throughout the day. Kids are more likely to stay nearby and not wander off if they have a “safety job.”**
- 4. Instruct children that they should not be alone in the park or become isolated with anyone, even those costumed characters. They should also not accept any gifts or prizes from anyone unless they've checked first with you or the supervising adult.**
- 5. If children do become separated from you, teach them to look for a “safe stranger” who can help: for example, a mom with kids or the cash register person. Avoid telling children to go to the manager or even security guard. It can be difficult for a young child to ascertain who these people are and you don't want them making the wrong choice.**
- 6. With older children, agree on a “meeting place” ahead of time if you should become separated. “We'll meet at the Merry-Go-Round” if you get lost.**
- 7. All kids must know that they should NEVER leave the amusement park, the beach, etc. to go looking for you in the parking lot, no matter what anyone tells them. Remind your child that you would never leave until you are reunited.**
- 8. Dress children in brightly colored clothes to help keep them easily visible, and be sure to**

remember what they are wearing. Especially their **SHOES**. You may even want to take a quick picture with your cell phone before venturing out.

9. In an emergency, a loud yell is one of the best things a child can do. Teach them to yell out “STOP,” “HELP”, “THIS IS NOT MY DAD”. A child calling attention to himself in public is a predator’s worst nightmare.

10. In busy places like airports or large theme parks, consider using a cute harness for toddlers who are prone to running off. There are lots of fun ones out there that look like a lion’s tail, or elephant’s trunk. Don’t worry about what others think. It’s your peace of mind that is most important.

11. Teach all children the “CHECK FIRST” rule. Kids must always check first with you or the grownup in charge before going anywhere in a public place, including other stores, play areas, or even the restroom.

12. If kids are on a group outing with a camp, be sure to ask what their procedure is for a child who gets separated from the group. Is there adequate supervision overall? Find out what the adult-to-child-ratio is for the group. Is one counselor looking after 6 kids or 16 kids? It makes a difference!!

13. Don’t leave children alone at public facilities such as video arcades, movie theaters, play areas, etc. as a “convenient babysitter”. Predators are known to look for kids who are unsupervised.

14. Always bring young children into the restroom with you. Look for well-lit restrooms in high traffic areas whenever possible.

15. Statistically, the men’s room is not always the safest place for a child to use alone. Older children should always use the buddy system when going to the restroom. If you must allow an older child (at least 10 years old) to use the men’s room alone, be sure to stand outside the door and call in as your child enters, “I’m right out here if you need me.” It’s a clear signal to anyone who may be hanging around in there, that there’s a MOM close by who’s paying attention! Your child is less of a target if a potential predator thinks there’s a chance they could be caught. If you think your child’s taking too long, go ahead and open the door and call in “Is everything okay?” If you don’t get an answer or are unsure, enter the restroom immediately to be sure your child is safe. (Informing your child that you’ll be doing this will encourage them to answer you quickly and not linger.)

16. Replace the word “strangers” with “tricky people!” Let them know that it isn’t what a person looks like that makes them unsafe, it’s what they say or want a child to do that makes someone “tricky”. Kids have been known to leave with a stranger because “he seemed nice” or “he didn’t look like a stranger.”

17. Tell your child to immediately notify you or the adult supervisors if they encounter anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable, weird, or just plain “yucky.”

18. Make sure that kids carry some form of identification and family/emergency contact information with them. (All children should know their parents’ cell phone number. If necessary, write it on a piece of paper and put in your child’s pocket.)

19. Practice appropriate “what if” scenarios with your children to be sure they feel confident and empowered with the right safety skills.

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Pattie Fitzgerald has been successfully teaching Child Safety Awareness since 2001. She is the founder and creator of Safely Ever After, Inc. and provides effective, non-fearful safety workshops, seminars, and keynote speeches for children and adults at schools, community organizations, and corporations throughout the United States. She has been featured on Good Morning America, CNN Headline News and MSNBC, as well as KCBS-2, KNBC-4 and KABC-7. Her written works have been published in numerous parenting magazines, trade journals, and newspapers throughout the United States. For more information or to book a seminar, visit www.safelyeverafter.com

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