







Child Safety

Tips and Advice for Safeguarding

RCIPS
We Care, We Listen and We Act

Royal Cayman Islands Police Service

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

814-6000

Anderson Square, 2nd Floor

Grand Cayman

www.rcips.ky

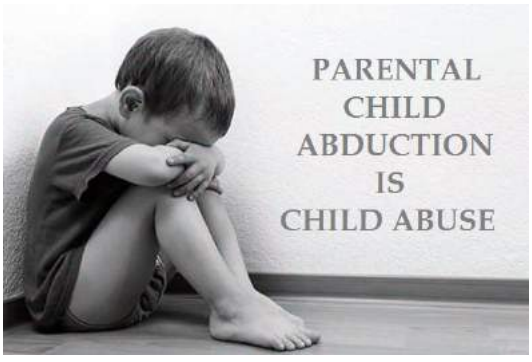
The Reality of Child Abductions

Whenever the local news brings the story of a kidnapped child or teen, the terrifying prospect of abduction fills the minds of parents everywhere. But it's important to remember that most kids pass through childhood safely following some basic safeguarding guidance.

One of the challenges of being a parent is teaching your kids to be cautious without filling them with fear or anxiety. Although some dangers will always exist in society, you lessen the chances that your child will be abducted by educating yourself and the child to potential dangers. Proper prevention methods will ensure that your child is not scared of the outside world, but rather more cautious and aware that there are people out there who are dangerous.

The circumstances surrounding child abduction are often quite different from the way they're shown in TV shows and movies. Here are some of the realities of child abduction:

- Most kids who are reported missing have run away or there has been a misunderstanding with their parents/guardians about where they were supposed to be.
- **Of the kids and teens who are truly abducted, most are taken by a family member or an acquaintance; 25% of kids are taken by strangers (*US statistic*).**
- Almost all kids kidnapped by strangers are taken by men, and about two thirds of stranger abductions involve female children.
- Most abducted kids are in their teens.
- Kids are rarely abducted from school grounds.



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Preventing Child Abductions

Incidents of child abduction are rare in the Cayman Islands, but parents and guardians should be proactive in the prevention of child abductions.

Key Strategies for Prevention: PARENTS & GUARDIANS

1-**Talk to your kids about safety.** This is not a one time conversation- it is a conversation that starts from the time they can talk and that builds with age appropriate information as they get older. Introduce a "safe word" that only you and your child know as an additional safety measure.

2- **Set boundaries about who/when/where/what.** When talking about safety, also be clear in your expectations about boundaries. Let your child know in clear terms where they can and cannot go, under what circumstances and for how long. Be as clear and concise as possible.

3- **Supervise them!** As children grow and become more independent supervision will become less about injury prevention and more about creating a safe environment. You don't need to hover, but be present and VISIBLE. Let others see that you are there and engaged. This includes open spaces like Camana Bay and the parks, closed spaces like the movie theatre, and while undertaking other activities such as fundraising at local shops. Don't forget about public restrooms!

4- **Don't leave kids alone in the car or the stroller. Ever. Not even for a minute.**

5- **Engage the village.** Talk to other family members and neighbours and help to create a system for supervision where multiple people are involved in different ways. Technology makes it great to get messages out quickly, but make it a point to meet and talk to your child's friends' parents or caregivers. Ask about safeguarding policies for all youth serving organisations that provide services to your children.

6- **Vet caregivers thoroughly.** When hiring a caregiver/babysitter/nanny make sure to ask pertinent questions, provide them with scenarios to gauge their responses, request police clearance certificates, and contact references and previous employers. All of these steps together will help you in your efforts to safeguard your child.

7- **Respect your child's privacy.** Don't dress children with clothing that displays their name as children are more likely to trust adults who call them by name. Don't share photos of your child online.

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What Every Parent Should Have

The most uncomfortable but necessary checklist for parents

- [ ] **ID-like photos of each child, taken every 6 months**
- [ ] **fingerprints for each child (at first this may seem like an extreme measure, but this step can save authorities much needed time when progressing an investigation should a child go missing)**
- [ ] **medical records**
- [ ] **dental records**
- [ ] **linked accounts with child's email/phone/social media**
- [ ] **parental controls and monitoring on all devices (phones, tablets, video games, television, computer)**
- [ ] **phone tracking apps (find my phone/ mobile)**
- [ ] **custody papers**
- [ ] **written communication with schools, clubs, and other youth serving organizations pertaining pick-up and drop-off of children (who, when, under what circumstances)**
- [ ] **names and contacts for all the parents with whom your child plays regularly (especially those whose house s/he frequents)**
- [ ] **safe word that only you and that child know**

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Talking about strangers



Only 25% of abductions are perpetrated by strangers. The majority are perpetrated by someone that the child or family knows. However, it is still important to teach kids about strangers.

If your child does not feel like they can trust you, they may not tell you what's going on in their lives. For example, say a strange person has been speaking to your child every day on the walk home from school. This person makes them nervous, but they don't feel like they can talk to you, so they keep it to themselves, and then they go missing.

Finding your child will be a challenge because you never knew about this person, so the police won't know either. Getting your child to talk to and trust you can be a difficult task, especially if they are in their rebellious teenage years, but it must be done.

Talk to your kids often about safety. Give them the basics on how to avoid and escape potentially dangerous situations. Teach them to:

- Never accept candy or gifts from a stranger.
- Never go anywhere with a stranger, even if it sounds like fun. Predators can lure kids with questions like "Can you help me find my lost puppy?" or "Do you want to see some cute kittens in my car?" Remind your kids that adults they don't know should never ask them to help or to do things for them.
- Run away and scream if someone follows them or tries to force them into a car.
- Say **no** to anyone who tries to make them do something you've said is wrong or touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Always tell you or another trusted adult if a stranger asks personal questions, exposes himself or herself, or otherwise makes them feel uneasy. Reassure kids that it's OK to tell you even if the person made them promise not to or threatened them in some way.
- Always ask permission from a parent to leave the house, yard, or play area or to go into someone's home.

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If your child is abducted

Because the first few hours are the most critical in missing-child cases, it's important to provide officials with information about your child immediately.

If your child has been abducted, contact the RCIPS (**911**) right away. The call taker will ask you for a recent picture of your child and will probably ask you many questions about the time and location you last saw your child and what your child was wearing. Use your "What every parent should have" checklist to provide the authorities with as much information as possible. Make notes to yourself while the information is still fresh in your mind: what was your child wearing? where was s/he last seen? anything out of the ordinary that stood out, even if minor.

If the matter becomes an international incident where it is known or suspected that the child has been removed from the jurisdiction then you may also request that your child be entered into National Crime and Information Center (NCIC). Other clearinghouses such as Child Protection Education of America ([866] USA-CHILD) and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children ([800] 843-5678) can offer information and support during your search.

After notifying the authorities, try to stay calm. You'll be able to remember details about your child's disappearance more easily if you remain rational and logical. Contact a family member or friend who can help offer you support, even by simply being there.

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Child Safety Conversations

Toddlers (ages 1-3)



Teach them:

* their name and guardian's name
* to stay within sight
* correct name for body parts
* parts of the body no one should touch (private parts)
* their body is theirs and they can say no (and it means no)
* safe, unsafe and unwanted touch ('uh-oh' feeling)

1-**The challenge of "no".** "No" is a very popular word at this stage, so it will be important to help children differentiate between the 'no' to feel safe and the 'no' to defy authority. Be consistent and repetitive. Ensure that other adults are also giving consistent messages.

2- **Use real life teachable moments.** Hypotheticals don't work with toddlers, so use real life teachable moments. This is a key stage to help children begin to understand right from wrong.

3- **Teach them to ask for help.** Children in this stage should be encouraged to ask for help and look for their caregiver. If they get separated from the caregiver they should stay in one spot.

4- **Uh-Oh feelings can come from people we know too.** It's important to let children know that sometimes "uh oh" feelings can come from people they know too, and if that happens they should tell you.

5- **Don't force children to be physically affectionate with anyone- including you.** Instead of telling a child to "hug" or "kiss" an adult, or even you, ask them "do you have hugs for me today?" Teach them from early on that their body is their own, and no one- not even mom or dad- should try to force them to do something with their bodies they don't want to.

Toddlers need a lot of supervision.

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Child Safety Conversations

Pre-Schoolers (ages 3-5)

Teach them:



* their address and phone number
* how to call 911 and describe an emergency
* identify trusted adults
* ask before going anywhere
* how to yell for help- "I need a grown up! Call 911! Help!"
* how to say "NO!" to unwanted or unsafe touch
* who is a stranger/ don't talk to strangers
* surprises not secrets
* **adults don't ask kids for help**

1-**Different parts, same rules.** Children become increasingly more social at this age, and you will need to demonstrate and reinforce appropriate interactions, including boundaries for safety. It's natural that kids begin to wonder more about their and their peers' bodies, and while things may look different the rules are the same. This is also another building block for age appropriate sex information.

2- **Touching can be confusing- especially if we use words like "good" and "bad".** Uncomfortable or "bad" touches can sometimes feel "good", and this is extremely confusing for kids. Build on the conversation about private parts- be sure to give specific examples about hygiene where little kids may need help, but be clear as to whom, where and when. Let them know that if they're ever touched in an uncomfortable way- whether it is their private parts or not- they should tell you right away.

3- **Use "what if" scenarios.** Simple "what if" scenarios are a great tool with this age group. Change up the settings so they can better understand- at this age they can't generalise information.

Pre-Schoolers also need a lot of supervision.

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Child Safety Conversations

Kinders and Elementary (ages 5-9)

Teach them:

* family password
* buddy system
* reinforce the "no secrets from a parent" rule
* list 5 trusted adults to call if there's a problem
* discuss online safety before giving them access
* monitor online activity
* elaborate on stranger danger
* age appropriate sex education



1-**Fantasy vs. reality** Kids at this age are highly engaged in stories and fantasy. When talking about safety, especially as it pertains to abductions, it is important to address the "fantasy" aspect some may take. Superheroes and fighting "bad guys" are great for books and cartoons, but real life scenarios will likely be scary, confusing, and not at all "hero like". Be clear: do what is necessary to run away (**not** 'fight the bad guy').

2- **Age appropriate sex education is more than "the talk".** The notion of "the" talk is done- research proves that in order to build better relationships with our kids and to enhance their understanding and help them make better choices pertaining to their bodies and sex parents should approach sex education as building blocks. The first is using correct names for body parts, and it moves on from there. There are numerous articles, books and even how to videos on how to talk to your kids, but local resources like the Family Resource Centre's "Talk Early, Talk Often" go a long way in helping parents build skills on how to talk to their kids about this topic. FRC- 949-0006.

3- **Who, what, when, where- Online.** Take the same precautions with children online as you would with them elsewhere. Talk to kids about not putting personal information online or giving out such information to people they meet online. Teach them that there is no such thing as "private" once something is digital, and that on the internet things are not always what they seem. Turn off wifi access at night.

Kinders and Elementary School age children need you to be VISIBLE.

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Child Safety Conversations

Middle School (10-13)

Teach them:



* don't put personal or emotional information online
* never agree to meet an online contact without first discussing with a parent/ guardian
* mobile phone/ texting guidelines
* responsibilities and rules for being home alone
* ongoing age appropriate sex education
* respect and consent in multiple forms (relationships, online, school, doctor, etc)
* dating and relationships- what, who, when, where and how.

1-**OH PUBERTY!** Physical and emotional changes are to be expected, but what few parents realize is that this also makes youth more vulnerable as this is a prime time when perpetrators use affection and attention to lure young people, both online and in person. Talk to your child about it all, including specifics about relationships- who is a mentor? who is a boy/girlfriend? who is a friend? who provides a service? This will help youth understand the boundaries. Make sure you and your child are updating the list of trusted adults to ensure that these people are saying the same things and reinforce the same boundaries.

2- **Bullying and cyberbullying.** While incidents of bullying and cyberbullying are being reported amongst younger and younger kids, puberty also enhances a child's vulnerability to these experiences because of the aforementioned physical and emotional changes. It is important to impress upon children how harmful this is as the prevention aspect here is both to keep kids from being victims and perpetrators of this form of abuse.

3- **Keep the lines of communication open.** Communication with your child is the most powerful tool you have against all the other contradictory and negative messages that she or he may be receiving from 'the world'. Communication will keep changing and evolving as your child changes and evolves, so make an effort to keep the lines of communication open and to reinforce all the lessons of the past as you add to content and context.

Child Safety Conversations

High School (14+)

Teach them:



* review mobile and internet expectations and rules
* be specific about 'location services' and other forms of online tracking
* go further in discussing respect and consent
* explain the gut instinct- encourage them to listen to it and follow it
* be an active bystander
* "No" is a complete sentence
* You have the right to change your mind
* Your safety is most important- always ask for help when you need it.
* **Yes, these things happen here in Cayman.**

1-**A time of risk and independence.** Teens are pre-disposed to push limits as they look to assert their independence. The teen brain is also 'under construction' and therefore they are also more likely to make less than optimal decisions. Discuss these realities with your teen- let them know that what they are experiencing is normal. Find strategies together to mitigate some risk taking behaviour.

2- **Hold the judgment.** Perhaps the hardest thing for parents to accept is that their children are individuals who will have their own beliefs and values and make their own choices. There is a huge difference between teaching and guiding a child and judging them. Talk to your teen about your values and why you believe what you do, but allow them the space to have their own thoughts about things. If they feel respected and heard, they will keep coming back to talk to you.

3- **Yes in Cayman.** The Cayman bubble is wide and strong, and perhaps one of the main contributors to our children's vulnerability. Yes, Cayman is much safer than countless other jurisdictions, but this doesn't make it immune to the ills of the world. These things happen, and discussing these real life incidents with your child as a way to reinforce safety rules will help to bring the message home.

Sources and Resources

Local organisations that can provide information, training or services:

Cayman Islands Red Cross- 949-6785

Department of Children and Family Services- 949-0290

Employee Assistance Programme- 949-9559

Family Resource Centre- 949-0006

Family Support Unit RCIPS- 946-9185

Health Services Authority- Child Psychologist: 244-2653

Special Needs Foundation Cayman- 949-7065

Learn more by logging on to:

https://www.kidguard.com/cell-phone-monitoring-and-gps-tracking/tips-on-child-abduction-prevention/

https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/abductions.html

http://www.childabduction.org.uk/

https://help.cbp.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/827/~/child--report-possible-child-abduction

http://www.missingkids.org/home

http://www.gundersenhealth.org/ncptc/jacob-wetterling-resource-center/keep-kids-safe/personal-safety/age-appropriate-conversations/

https://www.safekids.org/

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