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THE GIFT OF SAFETY FROM UNH'S CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN RESEARCH CENTER

By Erika Mantz
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Editor's note: David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire, has compiled this list of suggestions on how to keep children safe. Feel free to run it in its entirety.

What more important gift can a parent give a child than a safe and secure childhood?

The holidays are a good time to think about how to make your children more safe and secure. This can be especially true if they are changing routines, spending time with new people, traveling or facing stresses that sometimes accompany the holidays. These are some things parents can do to help protect their children in the many different realms in which they live, study and play.

Safety with Babysitters and in Daycare

Babysitters and daycare are not unusually high-risk situations for children, but a couple thousand such abuse cases are reported each year. Parents should be concerned about physical and sexual abuse on the part of both teen and adult sitters.¹

Suggestions:

Make clear to sitters and caregivers that you do not condone the use of physical punishment with your child.

Make clear to sitters and caregivers that you have
discussed appropriate forms of touching and other abuse prevention topics with your children.

Let your child know that you want to hear about anything discomforting or upsetting that occurs to them while in the company of the caregivers.

**Safety at school**

About one in 10 school-age children say they were the victim of bullying in the last year. The bullying tends to increase during elementary and middle school years, and decline during high school.²

Suggestions:

Encourage your child not to be a bystander if they witness bullying or harassment. They should report it to teachers and to you. Ask your school officials to implement a bullying prevention policy and curriculum, if they don't currently have one.

Practice with your child how to negotiate and look for alternatives in situations of conflict, so as to avoid escalations of conflict into violence.

**Safety on the Internet**

One in five youth who use the Internet regularly receive an online sexual solicitation over the course of a year, and one in four receive unwanted pornography.³

Suggestions:

Make sure your children do not post or give out personal information that would allow them to become the targets of solicitations, lures and spamming.

 Warn children about the dangers of meeting face-to-face with people they have only met online.

 Be sure to explain how people can use the Internet to mislead them and exploit them
sexually or economically.

**Safety in the Home**

Family members are responsible for more violent crimes against children than strangers.\(^4\)

Suggestions:

Make sure firearms, if they are in the home, are stored inaccessible to children, unloaded and away from ammunition.

Make a vow not to use physical violence on children, and if you feel the urge, take a break, and get assistance from friends, family or parenting educators to help resolve stressful situations.

Make clear to partners, relatives and other adults in your household that you will not tolerate violent or abusive behaviors.

** Keeping Your Child from Becoming Missing**

Close to 800,000 children are reported missing each year. The most common reason is running away.\(^5\)

Suggestions:

Even if your relationship with your child is strained, encourage your child in times of crisis and discouragement to stay in contact with some responsible adult, a relative, a neighbor, or the parent of a friend.

** Dealing with Children's Fears in a Troubled Time**

Events in the news, from terrorist attacks, to kidnappings, to snipers, to school violence, have the potential to frighten children.

Suggestions:

When the media are preoccupied with frightening events, minimize the amount of your child's
television exposure. The graphic and repeated images on television tend to produce the most fear.

Answer children's questions, but do not volunteer more than they want to know.

Reassure your child as much as possible about such things as the unlikelihood of their being harmed, what is being done by authorities, and your commitment to their well-being.

Do not reveal all of your own fears and concerns with a child or in the child's presence.

"Our world certainly is too dangerous a place for young people," says David Finkelhor, director of UNH's Crimes Against Children Research Center. "But in the last few years we have made progress in reducing some of the risks like homicide, sexual abuse, teen pregnancy and running away, because of the gift of awareness about these problems. This holiday and this New Years, let us spread this gift even more widely than ever."

These are only a few among many things that parents can do to keep their children safe. More information on children's safety is available from some of the following sources:

National Resource Center for Safe Schools:
http://www.nwrel.org/safe/

Prevent Child Abuse America:
http://www.preventchildabuse.org/

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:
http://www.missingkids.com/

Crimes against Children Research Center:
http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/

On babysitters:

On school safety:
http://www.nwrel.org/comm/topics/safe.html

On the Internet:
http://www.missingkids.com/ click on Education & Resources

On missing children:
http://www.missingkids.com/ click on Education & Resources

On children's fears:
http://www.joannecantor.com/

References


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