

CHILD SAFETY AND SECURITY TIPS

San Diego Police Department
Neighborhood Policing Resource Team
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This paper contains tips on child safety and security for parents and guardians. They are simple, common sense suggestions that will help keep your children from being an easy target for a criminal. They deal with caring for your children in various situations, teaching your children how to be safe in various situations, protecting your children's identities, selecting a child care center or family child care home, selecting a nanny or babysitter for home child care, and reporting child abuse.

Additional tips on home security, vehicle security, vacation safety and security, personal safety and security, senior safety and security, preventing crimes against businesses, preventing fraud and identity theft, reporting crime and suspicious activities, reporting suspicious activities for terrorism prevention, reporting disorder and other problems, obtaining crime information, dealing with homeless people, and starting a Neighborhood Watch program are available in the Crime Prevention and Education section of the SDPD website at www.sandiego.gov/police.

CARING FOR YOUR CHILDREN IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS

Basics

- Know where your children are at all times. Make sure that they return home promptly at appointed times.
- Know what your children wear every day. Avoid putting their names on the outside of their clothes. Children may respond more readily to a stranger who calls them by name.
- Never leave your child alone in a vehicle, restroom, store, playground, or other public place.
- Have your child play in a supervised area with friends you know.
- Let your child know where you will be at all times and how to get in touch with you.
- Keep a record of your children's friends and their phone numbers.
- Post a list of important phone numbers near your phone. Include the numbers of your work phone, a neighbor or trusted friend to call for help in a non-emergency, a family member or trusted friend to call in an emergency, family doctor, etc.
- Keep an updated information file on your children. Include pictures, fingerprints, footprints, physical characteristics, identifying marks, medical and dental records, etc.
- Find out why your child doesn't want to be with someone or go somewhere. The reason may be more than a personality conflict or a lack of interest.
- Notice when anyone shows an unusual amount of interest in your child or gives him or her gifts. Ask your child why he or she is acting that way.
- Before leaving your child alone at home make sure he or she is not afraid to be alone and is able to follow your instructions about dealing with various situations that might arise.
- Have a way to contact your children if you will be late in picking them up, meeting them somewhere, coming home, etc.
- Attend your children's activities so you can observe how other adults who are involved interact with them. Talk to the person in charge if you become concerned about anyone's behavior.
- Make time every day to discuss the day's events with your children. Encourage them to tell you about anything that makes them uncomfortable, or scares or confuses them. Listen to what they say and never underestimate their fears or concerns. Show them that you are always concerned about their safety and security. Effective communication is the most important factor in child safety.
- Be alert for any changes in your child's behavior. Look and listen for things that indicate something is troubling him or her. Children are often uncomfortable in disclosing disturbing events or feelings because they are concerned about your reactions to their problems. When they do talk about their problems be calm, compassionate, reassuring, and nonjudgmental as you work with them to resolve the problem.

- Discuss the safety and security tips in this paper with your children in a calm, reassuring manner so as not to frighten them. Analyze situations in which they apply and make sure your children understand how to react quickly and appropriately in them.
- Make sure your home is secure with deadbolt locks on outside doors, locked side-yard gates, secondary locks on sliding glass doors and windows, burglar and smoke alarms, etc. Additional tips on controlling access, providing visibility, and maintaining a safe home are available on the page entitled *Home Security* in the Crime Prevention and Education section of the SDPD website at www.sandiego.gov/police.

When Shopping or in a Public Place

- Have your children stay with you at all times. Tell them not to wander off, leave the store, or hide. Don't get distracted by the sights, sounds, and crowds when shopping during holidays.
- Tell them to go to the nearest clerk or person with a nametag and ask for help if they become lost. Show these people to them when entering the store.
- Accompany younger children to restrooms.
- Never leave your child at a video arcade, movie theater, food court, toy store, or mall play area as a convenient "babysitter" while you are shopping. Personnel in those areas are not there to watch children.
- If you allow an older child to go to without you, have him or her go with a friend and set a time for them to return.

When Moving to a New Neighborhood

- Meet your neighbors and introduce your children to them.
- Take your children on a walking tour of the neighborhood.
- Show them safe places to go if they need help, e.g., neighbor's or friend's homes, businesses, offices, etc.
- Show them places to avoid, e.g., deserted or abandoned buildings, dark or isolated areas, etc.
- Make a map of safe routes to the school, playground, stores, and other places where they would be allowed to go.

When Going to and from School

- Walk your child to and from school, and point out dangerous spots and safe places to go if he or she needs help.
- Have your child walk or bike to and from school with a friend. There is safety in numbers.
- If your child takes a bus to and from school, visit the bus stop with your child and make sure he or she learns the bus number. Have your child stay with a group while waiting for the bus.
- Ask the school to notify you whenever your child is not in class.
- Make sure that the school will not release your child to anyone but yourself or a person previously designated by you, and that the school will call you back to verify any call saying that some person will come to pick up him or her.

When Using the Internet and Cell Phones

Although the vast majority of online services and Internet material is legitimate and benign, there have been numerous incidents of children receiving pornographic material, providing personal information under the pretext of possibly winning a prize, or sending money for promised benefits or products. Warning signs of these dangers include: excessive late-night computer use; secretive behavior about computer associates; password-protected bios, files, or logical drives; and hidden files or directories. You can do the following things to minimize these dangers:

- Set reasonable guidelines for Internet and cell phone use. Prohibiting Internet use is not a good idea because it is too easy for children to establish accounts at a friend's house or many other places. But do set time limits on computer use. People, not computers, should be their best friends and companions
- Keep the computer in the family room or other area where its use can be monitored. Don't allow computers to be in your children's bedrooms.

- Children should not have separate log-ons. But be aware that children can access the Internet away from home.
- Talk to your children about their Internet use. Encourage them to come to you with any problems they encounter online. Make sure they understand the importance of password and privacy protection, and not to share passwords or log-on names with anyone else. And don't let them use their pet's names as passwords.
- Never allow your child to meet someone they have "talked" to online. Tell your child that people online are not necessarily who they might seem to be.
- Use filtering software to scan for offensive words and phrases in chat rooms and then end the conversations by signing off.
- Install a browser that limits the websites that your younger children can visit to those vetted by educational professionals. Some will send you periodic e-mails that detail you children's Internet activity.
- Install a monitoring service like McGruff SafeGuard. It's free and also scans any chat or text conversations for bad language and other inappropriate communications. Go to www.gomcgruff.com for details of this service.
- Have your children promise not to turn off any programs you might install to monitor their computer use.
- Understand how online services work.
- Check the computer's cache and history to see what websites have been accessed.
- Ask your children for their passwords and log-on names, and to share their blogs and online profiles with you. Be aware that they can have multiple accounts on multiple services. Search for you children's identifying information and monitor their screen name(s) and websites for inappropriate content.
- Prohibit your children from downloading any games, movies, programs, etc., trying to win free things, or buying things without your permission.

Children who use networking sites like MySpace, Friendstar, Facebook, Xanga, and LiveJournal should be warned about online predators and harassers. They should be taught to do the following to prevent and deal with any problems that might arise:

- Never to give out their name, address, phone number, or any other personal information that can identify them. Avoid posting anything that would enable a stranger to find them, e.g., school names. Members' profiles become public information. And never say they are home alone.
- Don't post anything that you wouldn't want the world to know, especially anything that might embarrass you later. What's uploaded can be downloaded and passed around or posted online forever.
- Never send out any pictures of themselves, their families, or their friends.
- Be careful about adding strangers to your friends list. People aren't always who they say they are.
- Report harassment, hate speech, and inappropriate content to you.
- Check comments regularly. Ignore and don't respond to any that are mean or embarrassing. Just log off if the harassment bothers you.
- Avoid misleading people into thinking you are older or younger than you are.
- Don't talk about sex with strangers.
- Block people from sending you messages or e-mail, or delete them from your "buddy list" if they harass you.
- Change your password if someone hacks into your profile. Change you username and e-mail address if someone repeatedly bothers you.
- Contact the company that runs the site to have any profile of you deleted if it was created without your knowledge.
- Talk to someone you trust if you are upset about what is being said about you. If you are scared or threatened contact a Juvenile Service Team officer at your nearest SDPD area station and inform your Internet Service Provider.
- Report any attempted sexual exploitation on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Cyber Tipline at www.ncmec.org. This line is Congressionally mandated and your information will be forwarded to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation. Or call NCMEC's 24/7 hotline at **(800) 843-5678**.

Children should also be warned about virus creators, identity thieves, and spammers. These cyber-criminals are increasingly targeting users of social networking sites in an effort to steal their personal data and the passwords to their accounts. One of the tactics they use to gain access to this information involves sending social networking users e-mails that appear to come from online friends. For example, some Facebook users have been receiving e-mails from their “friends” that claim to contain a video of them. When they click on it they download a virus that goes through their hard drives and installs malicious programs. The virus, known as Koobface, then sends itself to all the friends on the victim's Facebook profile. A new version of the virus also is affecting users of MySpace and other social networking sites. Cyber-criminals are tricking social networking users into downloading malicious software by creating fake profiles of friends, celebrities, and others. Security experts say that such attacks, which became widespread in 2008, are increasingly successful because more and more people are becoming comfortable with putting all kinds of personal information about themselves on social networking sites. They warn that users need to be very careful about what information they post because it can be used to steal their identities.

To avoid problems on social networks or anywhere in the Internet, users should be warned to:

- Not to click on any links, videos, programs, etc. provided in messages, even if a “friend” encourages you to click on them.
- Get program updates from the company’s website, not through a provided link.
- Make your account so private that only your friends can see the details.
- Scan your computer regularly with an updated anti-virus program.
- Be suspicious of anyone, even a “friend,” who asks for money over the Internet.

Additional information on Internet dangers to children and how to keep children safe online is available on numerous websites. These include the following:

- San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force at www.sdicac.org
- National Cyber Security Alliance at www.staysafeonline.org
- San Diego County District Attorney at www.sdcdca.org. See the Protecting Children Online page under Protecting the Community.
- GetNetWise at www.GetNetWise.org
- Federal Bureau of Investigation at www.fbi.gov. See *A Parents Guide to Internet Safety* under Cyber Issues on the Reports and Publications page.
- NCMEC at www.ncmec.org. See resources for parents and guardians.

TEACHING YOUR CHILDREN HOW TO BE SAFE IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS

Basics

- Their full name, address, and phone number.
- How to make phone calls within and outside your area code, use **911** in an emergency, and reach an operator.
- How to use a cellular phone.
- Your full name, exact name of your place of work, work phone number, and any pager or cell phone number you have.
- Who to call in an emergency or non-emergency, and the difference between them.
- The names of the streets and landmarks in your neighborhood.
- Safe places to go if they need help
- Never to give out any personal information that can identify them.
- Tell you about anything unusual or suspicious that bothers them, or if anyone approaches or touches them in any way that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- Trust their instincts. If something doesn’t seem right, it probably isn’t. They have the right to say NO if they sense something is wrong.

When in Day or Home Care

- Say NO when anyone asks you to do something painful, embarrassing, or wrong. Do not be tempted by gifts or candy, or be compelled by threats.
- Not allow anyone to touch the parts of your body covered by your bathing suit. And don't touch anyone else's body in those places.
- Do not remain alone with an adult in a bathroom, office, bedroom, closet, or other isolated place.
- When in a bathroom, do not allow anyone to too much time watching you or fixing your clothes. And never touch bodily wastes or blood.

When Going to and From School

- Avoid shortcuts, deserted or abandoned buildings, and dark or isolated areas.
- Turn around and run to the nearest safe place if a person appears to be following them on foot, or a vehicle slows or stops by them. Safe places would be neighbor's or friend's homes, businesses, offices, etc.
- Not to hitchhike or accept a ride from anyone unless you have told them it is OK in each instance. Tell them to say NO and run away to a safe place if offered a ride by a stranger.
- Never to leave school with anyone they don't know. Establish a simple code word to be used if someone your children don't know comes to pick them up. Remind them about the word periodically and tell them not to accept a ride or go anywhere with anyone who does not know the code word. Stress that this word must be kept secret.

When Out and Away from Home

- Play with others, not alone.
- Teach the difference between a stranger who may be a danger and one who may be helpful. The simple "stranger-danger" message is inappropriate because the danger to children is much greater from someone who is not a stranger.
- Say NO to any unwelcome, uncomfortable, or confusing touching or actions by others and to get out of these situations as fast as possible. If avoidance is not possible tell them to make a big scene by screaming, yelling, kicking, and resisting.
- Not to get in a vehicle or go anywhere with a person without your permission
- Stay away from any adult who asks for help, e.g., "Can you help me find my dog?" or asks for directions (an adult should ask another adult, not a child for help), or tries to get you to go somewhere with them, e.g., "Your mom's hurt and she told me to come get you."
- How to use a pay phone.
- Not to let anyone take their picture and tell you if someone asks.
- Not to accept gifts or money from strangers. Have them tell you if anyone offers them gifts or money. Be alert for any new things they acquire.
- Not to be out alone at night.
- Not to go into anyone else's home without permission.

When Returning Home Alone

- Carry his or her house key in a secure hidden place. Leave an extra key with a neighbor or trusted friend and tell your child where it will be if it's needed.
- Not to enter the home if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, or a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway. Go to a neighbor's home and call the police.
- Lock the door immediately after entering and make sure the home is secure.
- Check in with you after arriving home to let you know that he or she has arrived safely.

When at Home Alone

- Not to open the door to a stranger or let an uninvited neighbor or acquaintance into your home. And not to even answer the door in some situations.
- Not to tell a caller that you are not at home. Have your child say you cannot come to the phone, ask the caller to leave a message, and say you will call back.
- If your child cannot take a message tell him or her not to answer the phone.
- To keep all doors and windows locked.
- Which appliances can be used and how to use them. Leave written instructions.
- Who to call or where to go in an emergency, and what constitutes an emergency, e.g., a fire, gas leak, smoke, etc.
- About all the safety and security features of the home, including smoke and burglar alarms, panic buttons, fire extinguishers, door and window locks, outside lights, etc.
- How to get out quickly in case of fire.
- To follow a schedule you set for homework, chores, TV watching, computer use, etc.

When Babysitting

- Know your employer. Only work for people you or your parents know, or for whom you have a good personal reference.
- Give us your employer's name, address, phone number, and where he or she is going and when he or she expects to be home.
- Have your employer show you all the safety and security features of the home, including smoke and burglar alarms, telephones, panic buttons, fire extinguishers, door and window locks, outside lights, etc.
- Keep all doors and windows locked while inside. Leave an outside light on after dark. Keep drapes or blinds closed at night but leave some lights on.
- Keep front door locked if you are out in the back yard or in a common play area.
- Follow the same security principles you use at home in answering the door or the phone.
- Don't say you are alone and babysitting when answering the door or phone. Say you are visiting and that you will take a message for the parents.
- Hold hands with the children when walking. When walking along a street, keep between the children and the street.

PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN'S IDENTITIES

- Provide your child's Social Security numbers only when it is required by a government agency or financial institution. Never provide it for identification.
- Carry your child's Social Security number or card in your purse or wallet only when you know you will need it.
- Teach your children never to give out personal information over the phone or on the Internet.
- Check to see if any of your children have a credit report by visiting www.AnnualCreditReport.com or calling (877) 322-8228, a service created by Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion, the three nationwide consumer-reporting companies. No report should exist unless someone has applied for credit using your child's Social Security number. No minor should have a credit report.
- Watch you children's mail for credit card applications, bills, or bank statements. They are signs that someone has started a credit history in your child's name.
- Request that banks in which your children have a accounts remove their names from marketing lists.
- Report any suspected identity theft to the three nationwide consumer reporting companies and obtain copies of any credit reports in your child's name and Social Security number. If your child does have a credit report ask to have all accounts, application inquiries, and collection notices removed immediately. Tell the credit issuer that the account is in the name of your minor child who by law isn't permitted to enter into contracts.

SELECTING A CHILD CARE CENTER OR FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME

The majority of child care centers, including preschools, and family child care homes in California must be licensed by the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services if they care for children from more than one family not related to the licensee. Child care programs that are exempt from licensing are those on public school sites, Federal property, or at a private elementary school that cares for more than 95 percent of its own children.

This licensing is designed to ensure that facilities provide a safe and healthy environment for children in day care. A licensed facility will meet the CCLD's standards for admission policies, daily practices and procedures, emergency plans, facility design and structure, indoor and outdoor space, equipment, nutrition, background clearances, staff qualifications, and adult-staff ratios. You should call the Division's Mission Valley Regional Office at **(619) 767-2200** to see if a child care facility in San Diego County you are considering meets these licensing requirements. You should also request to see the licensee's facility file which will contain information from evaluation visits conducted by the Division and any complaints against the facility that were substantiated by the Department. Child care centers are inspected annually, while family child care homes are inspected prior to being licensed and every three years thereafter.

You can get assistance in finding quality care for your child from the YMCA Childcare Resource Service by calling **(800) 481-2151** and asking to speak to a child care consultant. Information on this and other services provided by the Service can be found on its website at **www.ymcacrs.org**. Before making a final selection of a child care center or home you should visit several more than once and follow the 5 Steps to Quality Child Care under For Parents and Looking for Child Care on this website. They are Look, Listen, Count, Ask, and Be Informed.

A great deal of information for parents looking for child care is also available on the California Department of Social Services Child Care Licensing website at **<http://www.cclld.ca.gov/PG411.htm>**. It will answer the following questions:

- What types of licensed child care are available?
- How can I find a child care facility for my child?
- How do I choose a day care that's right for my child?
- What should I consider when looking for child care?
- What should I look for if my child is an infant?
- What should the facility provide for my child?
- What should I look for in regard to basic health and safety practices?
- What should I discuss with the day care provider?
- What will the provider need from me in order to enroll my child?
- How can I ensure a positive child care experience?
- What rights do parents have?
- What should I do if I have a concern regarding a provider?
- How can I file a complaint against a facility?
- How can I get help with day care costs?
- Where can I find information on child health and safety?

SELECTING A NANNY OR BABYSITTER FOR HOME CHILD CARE

Before entrusting your child to a nanny or babysitter you should check each candidate's references and work history, and then make sure he or she is registered with TrustLine by calling **(800) 822-8490** and providing the candidate's full name and driver's license number. It's that easy and it's free.

TrustLine is a database of nannies and babysitters that have cleared criminal background checks in California. It's the only authorized screening program of in-home caregivers in the state with access to fingerprint records at the California Dept. of Justice and the FBI. It was created by the California Legislature in 1987 to give parents an

important tool to use in selecting a caregiver for their children. It is administered by the California Department of Social Services and endorsed by the California Academy of Pediatrics. All child-care providers registered with TrustLine have submitted their fingerprints to the California Dept. of Justice and have no disqualifying criminal convictions in California. TrustLine also examines the California Child Abuse Central Index for substantiated child abuse reports and verifies the applicant's identification number with the California Department of Motor Vehicles or the Immigration Naturalization Service. Since 1999 applicants also received a clearance from an FBI criminal record check. All employment agencies are required to use TrustLine. Thus nannies and sitters obtained through an agency will either be registered or in process of being registered. If a candidate you are interviewing is not registered tell him or her to call TrustLine at **(800) 822-8490** or go to its website at **www.trustline.org** for information on how to register.

The TrustLine website also contains a set of tips on choosing a child-care provider. It lists questions to ask and things to do after selecting a good caregiver. The latter include the following:

- Set up clear job responsibilities.
- Continually assess how the arrangement is working.
- Drop in unannounced at random times to time to see how your child is doing.
- Leave emergency contact information.
- Call TrustLine periodically to make sure your caregiver is still registered. It is updated continually and caregivers who have committed a disqualifying crime subsequent to their clearance are removed.
- Ask your child how he or she is getting along with the caregiver.

The following additional tips deal with relations with a caregiver:

- Fire any caregiver provided by an agency who offers to work independently for less.
- Notify the agency immediately if you have any concerns about the caregiver it provided.
- Lock up all financial records, checkbooks, credit cards, personal ID information, etc.
- Do not allow the caregiver to have access to the home computer.
- Do not lend money to the caregiver.
- Supply a limited amount of cash for necessities and require receipts and an itemized accounting of all expenditures.

In hiring a caregiver privately seek referrals from a trusted source first. If possible avoid using a "help wanted" ad. And do not respond to an ad by a person seeking employment as a caregiver. Interview all prospective caregivers. For your safety, do it in a public place, e.g., a coffee shop, not at your home. And don't give out your home address. Ask the applicant to do the following:

- Fill out an employment application that asks for personal information, education, employment history, applicable licenses and certificates, personal references, etc.
- Provide proof of citizenship or legal residency, a state-issued photo ID, and a Social Security card.
- Provide his or her driver's license number and automobile insurance policy information if driving is involved.
- Register with TrustLine.
- If the applicant is not already registered and refuses to apply, and you want to conduct a background investigation to verify personal information that is not a matter of public record, e.g., education, credit, and medical records, you should ask the applicant to sign an investigation authorization form. For the investigation you can hire a private investigator or do it yourself. You can find an investigator in San Diego on the California Association of Licensed Investigators' website at **www.cali-pi.org**. The authorization form will be provided by the investigative agency. The investigator would check criminal, civil, and credit records, the applicant's driving history, the applicant's Social Security number, etc.

If you decide to do the investigation yourself you should first check the applicant's employment history and personal references. Then you should check the public records of criminal and civil court cases in San Diego County in the past 10 years. They are available at the following four locations:

Central District	330 W. Broadway	San Diego	92101	(619) 615-6358
East County Dist.	250 E. Main St.	El Cajon	92020	(619) 441-4461
North County Dist.	325 S. Melrose Dr.	Vista	92083	(760) 726-9595
South County Dist.	500 3rd Ave.	Chula Vista	91910	(619) 691-4439

You should also call the San Diego County Courthouse at **(619) 544-6401** to find out whether there are any outstanding San Diego County warrants on the applicant. All you need is his or her first and last name and birth date. Warrant information is available to the public and it's free. A search of outstanding San Diego County warrants can also be made on the County Sheriff's web site at **www.sdsheriff.net**. Just click on Warrant for Arrest. For records of cases and warrants in other counties you must contact the court clerks and sheriffs in those counties.

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Call the County Social Services Department's Child Protective Services Child Abuse Hotline at **(858) 560-2191** or **(800) 344-6000** to report situations in which you suspect that a child has been abused or appears to be at risk of being abused. Your report will be investigated and steps will be taken to protect the child and preserve the family unit. The SDPD will be informed if abuse is involved. If you know that abuse has occurred, you should call SDPD directly at **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. If the abuse is in progress you should call **911**. The police will investigate, take steps to protect the victim and prosecute the abuser, and inform the County Social Service Department.

The following are some signs of child abuse:

- Unusual or suspicious injuries
- Sexual language or behavior beyond what is normal for the child's age
- Specific comments or complaints about abuse
- Lack of basic needs for food, clothing, and medical care
- Poor hygiene
- Lack of supervision for long periods of time

And for sexual exploitation:

- Changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying
- Bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances
- Acting out inappropriate sexual activity or showing unusual interest in sexual matters
- Sudden acting out of feelings or aggression, rebellious behavior
- Regression to infantile behavior
- Pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in private areas
- Fear a certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people.

SDPD AREA STATIONS

Central	2501 Imperial Ave. SD 92102	(619) 744-9500
Eastern	9225 Aero Dr. SD 92123	(858) 495-7900
Mid-City	4310 Landis St. SD 92105	(619) 516-3000
Northeastern	13396 Salmon River Rd. SD 92129	(858) 538-8000
Northern	4275 Eastgate Mall SD 92037	(858) 552-1700
Northwestern	12592 El Camino Real SD 92130	(858) 523-7000
Southeastern	7222 Skyline Dr. SD 92114	(619) 527-3500
Southern	1120 27th St. SD 92154	(619) 424-0400
Western	5215 Gaines St. SD 92110	(619) 692-4800

SDPD STOREFRONT OR SATELLITE OFFICE

Address _____
Phone _____ Contact person _____