



Trauma
Care

Newsletter

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Child Abduction

One minute she's there and the next she's gone. It is every parent's worst nightmare not to know where their child is, or what's happened to them.

Sometimes kids are never found, as in the case of Etan Patz who was abducted in New York in 1979. His father spoke of "the crime that had a beginning, but no end."

Here are some facts on kidnapping and abductions. And also some hints on what parents can do to prevent these from happening.

There are 3 types of abductions

- When a stranger takes a child away for criminal purposes (such as sexual assault or ransom – the latter would be classified as a kidnapping in South Africa);
- When a child is stolen to be brought up by the abductor;
- When a parent removes a child from the other parent's care.

The shocking reality

Since the initiation of official statistics in 1994 over 900 of the children reported missing in South Africa, have not been recovered. A child goes missing **every six hours** in South Africa, according to figures released by the South African Police Service Missing Persons Bureau. This adds up to a total of 1460 children per year. Fortunately, according to Missing Children South Africa's statistics, more than 87% of them are found within the first week. Sadly, this still leaves us with at least 13% of the children not being located.



Trafficking in children is a global problem affecting large numbers of children. According to UNICEF and World Concern some estimates have as many as 1.2 million children begin trafficked every year. "Children and their families are often unaware of the dangers of trafficking, believing that better employment and lives lie in other countries." (http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_exploitation.html)

and

<http://www.worldconcern.org/StopTrafficking/>)

The reality is shocking and undeniable – there is a tremendous demand for children to be traded into forced (cheap) labour or for sexual exploitation.



It can happen to your child!!!!

Parentable abduction

In the case of parental abductions, the parents are usually involved in a custody battle. Children are almost never harmed in these abductions, and according to studies, the vast majority of them are returned to the rightful parent within a week.

Anyone who takes a child under 16 years of age to another country, or keeps the child there, without the consent of a parent or guardian who has responsibility for the child, has committed the offence of international child abduction. Most such cases involve a child being taken to another country and kept there by its mother or father, for instance after a holiday. Sometimes other family members are also involved. About 150 children are abducted each year. The government tries to prevent such abductions and to solve these cases quickly when they occur.



The Hague Convention on International Child Abduction

The most important international agreement on international child abduction is the Hague Convention on Child Abduction. This convention applies to children who are under 16 years of age. It states that any child who is wrongfully removed to another country must be returned as soon as possible to the country where it was living before the abduction. Absent a court order, married parents have equal rights of custody and access to their children. Absent a court order, the mother of a child born out of wedlock has sole rights of custody and access, with limited exceptions. In such cases, a father can petition the court for rights to custody and/or access, and the court will grant them if to do so would be in the best interest of the child.

Parental child abduction is not a criminal offense under South African law, though a non-custodial parent who abducts his or her child may be held in contempt of court for violating a court order. However, in cases involving an existing South African custody order, "refusal of access" by a person having care or custody of a child to another person who has access to the child or who holds parental responsibilities is a crime punishable by a fine or imprisonment up to one year.

Keeping your child safe



Generations of parents have told their children "Don't talk to strangers" and considered the job done. It's a dangerous and outdated assumption. "Parents need to do more. And they can," says Kenneth Wooden, founder and president of Child Lures Prevention, a sexual abuse and abduction prevention program. Keeping your eyes open, staying vigilant, and trusting your instincts about people are the first, best lines of defense against predators, who may be closer than most people think.

The stranger who grabs a child and takes off with her in his car may rivet parents to the national news, but it's not the norm. Most children are victimized by someone they know. And most of the time, those unfortunate children are targeted by sexual predators who are intent on physical and emotional abuse.

Who are the predators? Just take a look around. "They put themselves in places where they know they're going to have proximity to kids," says John J. Sullivan Jr., founder and former chief of the Child Pornography Enforcement Program. Besides the fact that the majority are males, child sexual predators don't fit a particular mold. Representing all races, backgrounds, and religions, they're impossible to classify. "They represent a cross section of the American population landscape: rich and poor, PhDs to illiterates, professionals to laborers, the unemployed to corporate executives," Dr Wooden has interviewed more than 1,000 convicted predators in his efforts to educate parents and children about the tricks of their trade.

According to information gathered, many molesters are married with children and working, so they manage to stay just below the radar, appearing acceptable to society at large. Often they're considered pillars of society. Typically they feel no remorse for their actions and are masters in the manipulation of children.

Predators attack in everyday settings. "It happens in dentist and doctor offices, at diving meets, and at daycare centers". Most victims are convinced without force or a weapon to get in the predator's car or enter a home or other building.



Most abductions involve deception through well-known lures that still work. The most brutal acts against children began with free candy, the offer of a modeling contract, or a picture of a fluffy little kitten. Wooden has determined the following to be the most lethal:

Lost Pet: "It's important that we look our children in the eyes and say: 'There is no lost pet,'" emphasizes Wooden. And if there were, why would a grown-up be asking a child for help? It's simply not normal. Wooden recommends: "Tell them that if an adult asks you to look for a lost pet, you are in danger; get out of there!"

Assistance: Tell children that adults do not ask children for help; they ask other adults. If the adult approaches in the car, says Wooden, tell your kids to run in the opposite direction. If someone knocks on the door, tell your child not to open it under any circumstances. In a recent study, children opened the door time and time again to "a neighbor" needing help. Some even said "I'm not supposed to open the door" while doing so.

Authority: Make sure kids understand that they should never go anywhere with anyone without their parent's verbal permission -- regardless of whether the stranger wears a uniform or shows a badge or ID. "We tell kids that if someone wants to take you to an office, they need to call a parent right away," says Baker. "That child is a minor and has a right to have a responsible adult present." This applies to all situations, including school, the local video arcade, or the mall. Cells phones and walkie-talkies, she states, are a great safety investment.

"The only way to know if someone is a sex offender is if they have a record -- or if a mom has good instincts," says Wooden. If you have "a bad feeling" about your child's church youth leader or day camp counselor, don't ignore it. Keep your child away.

Likewise, if your child says he's uncomfortable being around someone, probe a little deeper. Intuition is not psychic nonsense. It's a survival instinct that has allowed humankind to avoid predators of the four-legged

and two-legged variety for millennia. Tell your kids to trust it. Remind them that even if they turn out to be wrong, it's better to be embarrassed than a victim.

"No child has the wisdom or strength to take on a sexual predator," emphasizes Wooden. Here are some tips recommended by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for keeping kids out of danger.

STRANGER DANGER

Talk openly and often. "Hundreds of pedophiles have told me, 'Show me a kid who knows nothing about sex and I will show you my next victim,'" says Wooden. Make sure your children know what's appropriate for their age level. For young children, it's enough to know that their private parts are off-limits and if anyone touches them or tries to touch them in places that make them feel ashamed or uncomfortable, they can tell Mom or Dad. Play out scenarios, such as what to do if a stranger pulls up in a car, to reinforce lessons.

Create a family phone book. Designate a page for each child that includes home and cell phone numbers of friends' families. In the event your child is missing, you'll have an immediate network of people to call, not only to check to see whether your child is there, but also to start spreading the word in case the worst has happened.

Educate your child about the law. Kids should know that no one has the right to touch their private parts or to ask them to touch theirs, because it's against the law, says Wooden. Threatening a child is also illegal. Kids need to be told that adults who do this will be punished.

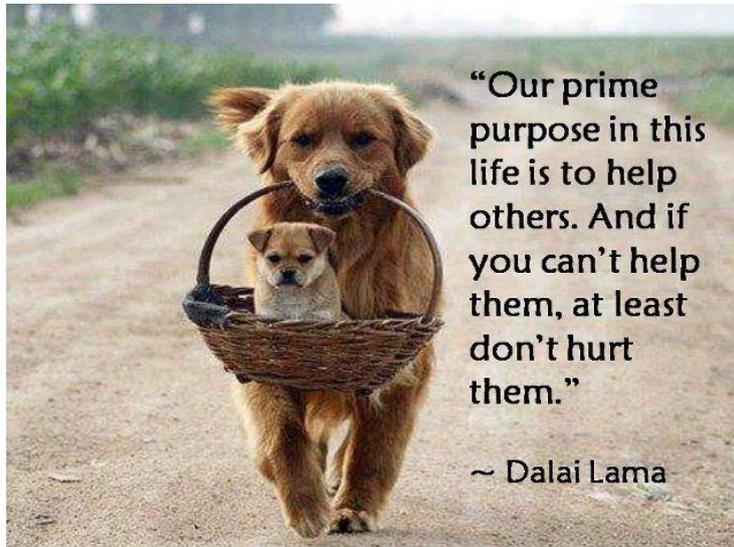
Look for a mother with kids. Instead of telling children to beware of all strangers, parents should be helping kids to understand that some strangers can be helpful. If a child is lost, being threatened, or in need of help, advise him to go to the nearest mother with children. Statistically, this person will be the most likely to help, not hurt your child. A store clerk behind a counter is also a good choice. They're in a public place and can summon the police if necessary.

Check out everyone. Parents need to know and demand background checks from everyone who comes in contact with their child, say the experts, including the husband and older son of your daycare provider. A legitimate provider should allow a parent complete access to her child at the daycare, including unannounced visits. Ask your local police department for online listings of child predators in your area.

Be careful about sleepovers. "A lot of abuse occurs at sleepovers, and I don't advocate them until the child is at least 10 because you just can't control these situations," says Baker. Be sure to meet both parents of all your children's friends. You won't be able to tell whether they're predators, but they will be less likely to prey on your child if they know you and your child have a close relationship.

Be vigilant. Baker advises parents not to permit children in their primary years to walk to school or a friend's house or play out front unattended. "They just are not going to be able to protect themselves," she says. While most people are good, parents can't take a chance when it comes to a child's safety. Sullivan encourages those in positions of authority to set standards. If you're hiring for a position involving children, run a credit check in addition to the criminal background check.

"Don't be afraid to make sure a situation is okay rather than watch a child be abducted," says Wooden. Although children should be taught to yell out: "This is not my mommy, this is not my daddy," or "I don't know this person," not every child will. If you see a car hanging around the street, park, or school yard, call the police, says Wooden. Half of all nonforcible enticements occur outdoors in such places.



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Play Therapy * Counselling * Trauma Counselling

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