

# A Parent's Guide To Family Safety

A Common Sense Guide To Keeping Your Family Safe

By Rich Brugger



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This eBook contains information that is intended to help the readers be better informed about personal and family safety. It is presented as general advice on personal and family safety strategies and tactics and is in no way intended to be comprehensive. Always seek professional advice for your individual needs.

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# CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION.....4**

**SECTION 1: CARJACKING & VEHICLE SAFETY .....5**

**SECTION 2: HOME INVASION PREVENTION.....8**

    TOP 10 HOME INVASION PREVENTION TIPS ..... 9

**SECTION 3: KEEPING YOUR KIDS SAFE .....11**

    PLAY DATE SAFETY .....11

    CHILD PREDATORS AND THEIR LURES.....12

    THREE THINGS ALL KIDS SHOULD KNOW.....14

    DON'T YELL HELP! .....15

    THE FAMILY PASSWORD .....17

    AWARENESS & DISTANCE .....18

**SECTION 4: ALL-SEASON SAFETY.....21**

    HALLOWEEN SAFETY .....21

    HOLIDAY SEASON SAFETY.....23

    HOLIDAY SHOPPING SAFETY .....25

    CRIMES OF OPPORTUNITY .....25

    KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE THIS SUMMER.....27

    TIP #1: DON'T ANNOUNCE VACATION PLANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES.....28

    TIP #2: DON'T ALLOW YOUR HOUSE TO APPEAR VACANT. ....28

    TIP #3: LIGHT UP YOUR PROPERTY AT NIGHT AND USE TIMERS INDOORS. ....28

    TIP #4: CONSIDER HIRING A HOUSE SITTER. ....28

    TIP #5: MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS LOCKED UP. ....28

    TIP #6: REMOVE YOUR SPARE KEY. ....29

    TIP #7: MAKE A HOME SECURITY CHECKLIST. ....29

    SUMMER SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR KIDS.....29

**BONUS SECTION: EDUCATING CHILDREN ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE.....31**

    THE SCORPION AND THE FROG.....31

**CONCLUSION .....34**

**USEFUL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS:.....35**

## INTRODUCTION

Raising happy, healthy, well-balanced children in a safe environment is of paramount importance to all responsible parents. The purpose of this manual is to provide a brief education on keeping your family safe in the face of some of the more common threats to your family's personal safety.

While it is impossible to adequately prepare for all possible scenarios, prevention is still the best course of action. For example, all of our safety tips for children: having a family password, exercising play date safety, awareness & distance training and the three things all children should know, all tie in to form the framework of a family safety plan that is based upon prevention through education.

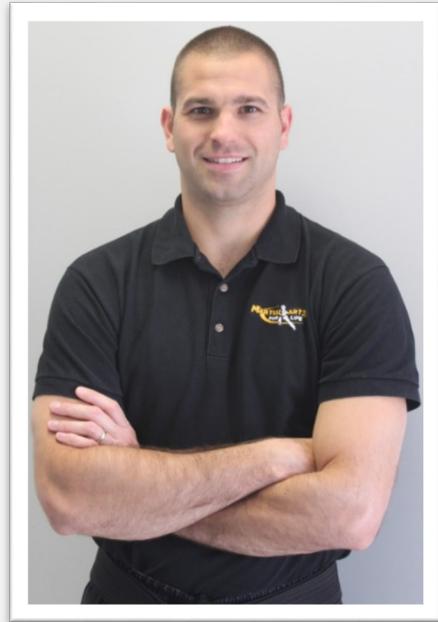
Occasionally, I'll come across a family who believes that because they reside in a "nice" neighborhood with a low crime rate, they don't need to be proactive when it comes to educating their children (or themselves) about sound family safety practices. Sometimes a family might express concern that such subjects are scary or uncomfortable to talk about. I think we would all agree that an elementary school catching fire and burning to the ground is a rare occurrence, and scary to think about. However, this does not stop us from having emergency exits and fire drills in case the worst should happen.

The fact is in any potentially dangerous situation, your loved ones are going to fall into one of two categories: They will either have absolutely no idea of what to do in order to protect themselves or they will have some idea of what to do. Which situation would you prefer?

Wishing you health, safety & prosperity,

*Rich Brugger*

Author, "A Parent's Guide to Family Safety."



## SECTION 1: CARJACKING & VEHICLE SAFETY

**T**housands of unsuspecting motorists are carjacked each year. Carjacking is a violent form of motor vehicle theft. It is a serious threat to one's personal safety because the perpetrator uses force to steal the vehicle. Sometimes the vehicle occupants are kidnapped during a carjacking. The worst case scenario occurs when victims are transported to a secondary crime scene, which is usually more dangerous than the original confrontation.

Many people mistakenly assume that carjacking crimes occur only in blighted areas. Carjackings can and do occur in all types of communities of varying socio-economic status. Recently, a couple was carjacked at gunpoint in Chatham, NJ. Also, The Cranford Patch reported on a carjacking that took place on Raritan Road in Cranford, NJ where the victim was threatened at knifepoint.

The recommended approach to remaining safe while driving is to remain cautious, use common sense, and educate yourself on techniques used by carjackers and what to do in a threatening situation. In any dangerous situation, you are going to fall into one of two categories: you will either have absolutely no idea what to do in order to protect yourself and your loved ones, or you will have some idea of what to do. Obviously, you want to have a good idea of what actions to take.

In order to form a plan of action, we must first understand some facts about carjacking crimes. According to a 9 year study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a weapon was used in nearly three-quarters (74%) of carjacking victimizations. Guns and knives were the most popular weapons chosen by thieves. Nearly one-third (32%) of victims of completed carjackings were injured.

A majority (68%) of carjacking incidents occurred at night (6 p.m. - 6 a.m.). 44% of carjacking incidents occurred in an open area, such as on the street or near public transportation and 24% occurred in parking lots or garages or near commercial places such as stores, gas stations, restaurants/bars, etc.

Some of the most common techniques employed by carjackers include:

- 1.) The Bump:** The attacker bumps the victim's vehicle from behind. The victim gets out to assess the damage and exchange information. *This is the tactic that was used to carjack the victims in Chatham.*
- 2.) Good Samaritan:** The attacker(s) stage what appears to be an accident. They may simulate an injury. The victim stops to assist, and the vehicle is taken.
- 3.) The Ruse:** The vehicle behind the victim flashes its lights or the driver waves to get the victim's attention. The attacker tries to indicate that there is a problem with the victim's car. The victim pulls over and the vehicle is taken.
- 4.) The Trap:** Carjackers use surveillance to follow the victim home. When the victim pulls into his or her driveway, the attacker pulls up behind and blocks the victim's car.

Awareness and avoidance are always the first steps in remaining safe, so let's go over some common sense tips to reduce your risk of being carjacked:

- ⦿ Drive with your doors locked and windows rolled up.
- ⦿ When stopped in traffic, look for possible escape routes. Leave enough room between your vehicle and the car in front of you to maneuver easily enough to escape.
- ⦿ When stopped at a red light, use your rear-view and side mirrors to monitor your surroundings. This makes it less likely for an attacker to surprise you.
- ⦿ Always keep your cell phone close by and have emergency numbers pre-programmed.
- ⦿ Be wary of panhandlers or people asking for directions and handing out flyers.
- ⦿ If you are bumped in traffic, be suspicious of the accident. Contact the police immediately.
- ⦿ Don't pull over in any isolated area. Get the other drivers attention and motion to him to follow you, and drive to a gas station or busy parking lot before getting out.
- ⦿ Be cautious of the Good Samaritan who offers to repair your car. It's okay to get help, just be alert and cautious.

If all else fails and you find yourself confronted by an armed carjacker, **do not resist!** Give up your keys or money (if demanded) without resistance. Never argue, fight, or chase the carjacker. You can be seriously injured. In a vast majority of carjacking scenarios, the vehicle is the primary target. There is a good chance that the victim might not be harmed. However, if you cannot escape in your vehicle, it is imperative that you get out of the vehicle right away. Remember, non-confrontation is often the best response. The object is not to thwart the criminal, but to survive!

In the wake of a carjacking, get to a safe place and call the police immediately to report the crime and provide detailed information.

## SECTION 2: HOME INVASION PREVENTION

One of the most frightening crimes is a home invasion. Statistically, you are 8 times more likely to be involved in a home invasion than a house fire. Here are 10 tips to keep your home safe.

One of the most frightening crimes that can occur is a home invasion. A home invasion is defined as “the act of illegally entering a private and occupied dwelling with violent intent for the purpose of committing a crime against the occupants.” The main difference between a simple burglary and a home invasion is intent. Residential burglars typically target homes that appear unoccupied and seek to perpetrate their crime in the absence of the homeowner. Conversely, the home invasion robber targets homes when they are most likely to be occupied (nights and weekends for example).

How do home invasion robbers pick their victims, and how do they get into your home? According to security consultant Chris McGoey, “Some home invaders might have been in your home before as a delivery person, installer or repair vendor. Home robbers rarely work alone and rely on an overwhelming physical confrontation to gain initial control and instill fear in you. The greatest violence usually occurs during the initial sixty seconds of the confrontation...”

While it is true that some home invaders violently enter the residence by kicking in the door, many home invasions begin by the homeowner simply answering their front door when someone knocks. Some common phrases used to get you to open your door are:

"I have a delivery I need you to sign for."

"I'm sorry. I think I just backed into your car outside."

"I think I just hit a dog and I'm looking for the owner."

Home invaders have also been known to pose as maintenance or public utility workers, delivery men, or even police officers.

Once an intruder gains access to the home, various demands are typically made to gain possession of jewelry, cash, and other valuables. Some invaders will tie their victims up while they ransack the home. Others will force one or more of the victims to leave with them, driving them to an ATM machine to withdraw cash.

Although few statistics are available on the crime of home invasion, because it is not defined as a crime in its own right in most jurisdictions, recent statistics have indicated you are eight times more likely to be involved in a home invasion attack than you are to be involved in a house fire. Below are ten tips to help you and your loved ones avoid the horror of a home invasion.

## TOP 10 HOME INVASION PREVENTION TIPS

1.) Secure your home with strong doors and locks. Research indicates the most common point of entry is the front door. Properly securing your front entrance will make it more difficult for an intruder to simply kick the door in. At the very least, a secure front door will slow down an intruder and buy you some time to contact the authorities or escape. Proper security includes solid core doors, heavy duty locks, and window security devices. Note that chain latches are considered ineffective as a barrier.

2.) Never open your door to strangers or solicitors. A majority of home invasions start with a simple knock on the door. Demand identification from anyone who you do not know. This includes utility workers, delivery persons, repairmen and even police officers who are in plain clothes. Verify the identification by calling that place of business (or the person's employer). If someone claims to be in distress or needs assistance or directions, tell them you are calling the police to respond.

3.) Develop an escape plan for your family and rehearse it. Train family members on where to go and what to say. If someone can escape, the invaders will have lost their advantage of privacy and time. Children are often overlooked as potential rescuers and sometimes are not as well guarded. If the opportunity presents itself, a trained child can dial 911, activate an alarm panic button, or escape to the neighbor's house to summon the police. Remember, the best defense against home invasion is education and planning.

4.) Maintain good relations with your neighbors, and keep an eye on each other. Get involved with your community. If you see something suspicious at a neighbor's house, contact them or the police immediately.

5.) Lock all doors, windows, and garages at all times. Fortification of rear doors, sliding glass doors, and garage doors are also important.

6.) If you have a home security system, set the home perimeter alarm at night. If someone attempts to gain entry, the alarm will sound, giving you time to respond.

7.) Keep porches and all entrances well lit, i.e., driveways, garages and alleys. Check bulbs regularly.

8.) Senior citizens or women living alone might consider leaving items such as a pair of men's boots or other garments laying about, giving the impression that other persons reside there.

9.) Consider owning a dog for protection. If this isn't possible, an empty dog bowl left on the porch gives the impression that there is a dog on the premises.

10.) Don't fight over property with an invader. Let them have the property; it is not worth your life and can be replaced. Never follow the intruder from scene, call 911 immediately and give the best description you can.

As Benjamin Franklin said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Educating yourself, preparing your dwelling and forming a well thought-out plan with your family is the first (and perhaps most effective) line of defense against a home invasion.

## SECTION 3: KEEPING YOUR KIDS SAFE

### PLAY DATE SAFETY

Every parent has heard the words "play date" and probably has had their child on one. The routine is usually the same! Your child comes home from school and says my friend Kelly or Tom wants me to come over tomorrow after school for a play date... can I go? The parent's next response goes something like this: I'll talk to or call Kelly or Tom's mom or dad and see if it's all right. My question to you, the parent is:

How Well Do You Know The Family And Their Home?

We want your children to **first** be safe and then have a great time. Here are a series of questions you should know **before** your child participates in a play date.

- 1.) Have you ever been to or in your child's friend's home? Do they have a swimming pool? Are there steep stairs and/or safety railings? How well are they going to be supervised? We have all heard at least one horror story, probably more, of a child drowning when left alone for a short period of time.
- 2.) Are you members of the family in law enforcement where there may be firearms in the home? If a child gets hold of an unsecured gun, we all know accidents can happen!
- 3.) Do they have any pets? Dogs, cats, parrots, snakes? Remember that any new person coming into a home is a stranger to any pet and also consider this if your child has allergies.
- 4.) Older siblings – Do they have any and what are they like? Are their friends going to be over also? A point to remember is a high percentage of child molestations are done by older children, usually familiar to the victim.

We want kids to have a great time with their friends, but our responsibility is always to make sure they will be safe.

Would You Lend Your Car To A Person You Don't Really Know? What About Your Child? Better Safe Than Sorry!

## CHILD PREDATORS AND THEIR LURES

Child abusers come from all walks of life. For safety's sake be sure to closely monitor children during play dates and multi-family gatherings, especially those involving multi-aged youth. Always ensure one-on-one time with adults is in observable spaces only. Additionally, proper and pro-active education on lures used by predators is key to preventing child abduction and abuse.

Child molesters and abductors have many methods to lure a child. Some of the most common child lures are:

**Affection Lure:** The affection lure is the most common and effective lure used by child predators. Most child abuse happens at the hand of someone the child knows and trusts. Child predators exploit that trust to take advantage of tensions in the child or teen's family, like divorce, substance abuse or neglect. When there is a physically or emotionally absent parent in the picture, it makes the child *much* more vulnerable.

**Pet Lure:** Children love animals. Many child predators will ask children to help look for their lost puppy or kitten. Parents must warn their children of this lure and let the kids know there is no lost animal.

**Assistance Lure:** Using an assistance lure predators will ask children for help with directions or help carrying something. Aggressors will also feign an injury or disability to elicit sympathy. Teach your children that adults should ask adults for help, not children. The best defense against the assistance lure is for kids to pretend they do not hear the person and quickly leave the area, then tell a trusted adult.

**Authority Lure:** Child predators in a position of authority take advantage of their positions. Make sure your children know it is illegal for adults to touch them in their bathing suit zone.

**Bribery Lure:** Predators will use gifts, like candy, toys, electronics or money, to get a child to willingly go with them, or they will use the gifts as a reward to keep the abuse secret or to keep the child tolerating the abuse.

**Emergency Lure:** Predators will fake a crisis to trick kids and teens into willingly going with them. For example, they will tell the child, "Your father has been hurt and is in the hospital. I've been sent to take you to him."

**Hero Lure:** Child abusers will exploit a child by making them believe something bad will happen to someone they see as a hero. For example, a parent, a teacher, coach, relative or celebrity. Children may endure repeated abuse to keep a “hero” out of trouble, or maintain a friendship.

**Name Recognition Lure:** Marking a child's clothing, backpacks and other belongings can be dangerous. Criminals can read the nametag and call out the child's name, creating a false sense of familiarity.

**Online and Computer Lure:** Online predators lure children through chat rooms, e-mails and social media. Through these avenues, a predator can learn a child's personal information and arrange a private meeting. Make sure you kids know to never post their personal information online. This includes information such as where they live or go to school.

**Threats and Weapons Lure:** Predators may use violence and intimidation to force children and teens to cooperate with the abuse, or stay silent about the abuse. They'll use an “it's my word against yours” approach.

It is important that you teach your children about each of these lures, not just one or two. Child abusers often use more than one of the lures at a time to get a child to comply with abuse and keep the abuse secret.

Besides educating your youngsters, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has several recommendations. Never send a small child on an errand alone or to walk to school unescorted. Statistically, most abductions take place near the child's home, some as close as 200 feet. Children should also be advised never to approach an occupied car or accept a ride from anyone without a parent present. That includes a driver who asks for directions. Children should be told to retreat from such a request.

It is also the responsibility of adults to take notice of anyone suspicious in their own neighborhoods. Attention should be paid to any strangers who may be lurking around schoolyards or playgrounds. Keep in mind that most offenders have prior contact with the victim. And that contact is usually a visual observation. If you have any doubt that someone is suspicious, call the police and let them decide. They will at least identify that person and determine his legitimacy for being where he is.

## THREE THINGS ALL KIDS SHOULD KNOW

In the event of a separation from a parent, young children should be taught what to do and whom to seek help from so they do not panic and make a bad decision.

Any responsible adult who has ever spent any time looking after young children knows how quickly they can seem to “disappear.” We’ve all had that heart stopping moment in a store, at an amusement park, or some other public place where we cannot locate the little guy or girl that was holding our hand a moment earlier. Usually, the situation is resolved quickly and without too much commotion, but it may serve as reminder that the possibility of a youngster getting lost is a reality.

Fortunately, in this type of situation, most people are able to recognize that a young child has been separated from their caregiver and will do their best to offer help and comfort to the child. However, the possibility does exist for a youngster to be harmed by someone who wishes to take advantage of the situation. Even if the child isn’t in any immediate danger, it is in everybody’s best interest for the youngster to be returned to his parents as quickly as possible.

In the event of a separation from a parent, young children should be taught what to do and whom to seek help from so they do not panic and make a bad decision. For starters, there are three important pieces of information that every child should memorize to help them get reunited with mom or dad as quickly as possible (after they locate help):

- #1.) Mom and Dad’s full names
- #2.) Home telephone number
- #3.) Home address

Many parents wonder when children become capable of learning and remembering their address and telephone number. Harvard researchers discovered that children as young as age 2 developed memories strong enough to repeat tasks shown to them months earlier, though in my experience a child’s ability to memorize a string of information (house number, street name, state) can vary greatly depending on the individual. Most 4-year-olds are very capable of memorizing their complete address, telephone number, etc. with some practice.

Many separations occur in a large store or a shopping mall. Amusement parks and outdoor events are also common places for children to get separated. It is of critical importance for your child to understand who should be approached for assistance. Obviously, you do not want your child walking around announcing that he or she is lost.

In a store, children should be taught to approach an employee such as a cashier or security guard who is located in the front of the store. In the event that the separation occurs somewhere other than a store or an employee cannot be easily located, kids should be taught to look for a mom who has children with her. In the event that a mom with children is not around, teach your children to look for an adult female, as this is usually a safer bet than an adult male. Furthermore, be sure to teach your children to stay put if they become separated and not to exit the building or event.

The next step after teaching your youngster is to role play at home or even in safe public spaces. Be sure to role play in a positive manner as younger children can become frightened if there is too much intensity.

There is no way to be 100% certain that your child will respond properly if he or she gets lost, but proper education and role playing will definitely increase the probability of success if the situation should occur.

## DON'T YELL HELP!

I have already mentioned the importance of children knowing their parents' names, telephone number and address as well as knowing what to do in case of separation from a parent in a public place. Next, I'd like to cover a subject that is equally important for your children's safety: what to do if someone forcefully tries to abduct them.

Nearly 60 percent of abductions are classified as "crimes of opportunity," which simply means they are committed without planning. When the perpetrator sees he or she has a chance to commit the act at that moment, they decide to seize the opportunity. A child who appears lost or unattended for just a few seconds can quickly become the victim of a kidnapping. In fact, according to Detective Mark Gado's article on Crime Library, the method of abduction in 65 percent of these types of incidents was a sighting, a sudden assault and a quick abduction.

In law enforcement, there is a concept known as the 21 foot rule. Basically, it states that an average healthy, adult male can cover 21 feet (7 yards) in about one and one and one-half seconds. It is frightening to consider how quickly a predator could identify an unattended child, run to him, grab him, and disappear into a vehicle – literally in a matter of seconds.

Many parents assume that teaching their children to simply yell, “Help!” or carry on and resist their abductor is sufficient. Unfortunately, this type of strategy can immediately backfire. Here’s why: it is very difficult for the average person to determine whether a screaming child is in the middle of a temper tantrum or in real danger. It’s a bit like a car alarm. Be honest, when you hear a car alarm, is your first instinct to investigate why the alarm is going off, or assume it is a false alarm and become annoyed by the unpleasant sound? The reason for this is conditioning – you have heard a car alarm hundreds of times and probably never seen it tripped as the result of a vehicle theft. Think about how many times you have seen a child carrying on or throwing a tantrum? It’s the same principle at work.

The key is to teach your children to yell things, which will empower them and draw attention to the situation. Here are three phases that will draw immediate attention and provide a good chance for any bystanders to respond appropriately.

- 1.) **“FIRE!”** This is a good choice because it immediately draws attention to the situation. Most children do not yell, “Fire!” during a temper tantrum. Additionally, studies have shown that the average person is more inclined to call the fire department to report a fire rather than the police for a cry for help.
- 2.) **“THIS IS NOT MY MOM!”** or **“THIS IS NOT MY DAD!”** A distressed child that is resisting being carried away while yelling, “This is not my dad!” at the top of their lungs will definitely attract attention from bystanders. Even in the rare case that witnesses do not wish to get involved, this type of scene will often prompt a call to the police for further investigation.
- 3.) **“CALL 9-1-1!”** Once again, a child struggling and yelling for witnesses to dial 9-1-1 has a much better chance of getting a response than simply carrying on or yelling for help.

Additionally, a child who forcefully resists (punching, kicking, struggling, etc.) while yelling these empowering phrases has a much better chance of being released by the abductor.

While it is impossible to adequately prepare for all possible scenarios, prevention is still the best course of action. All of our family safety tips: having a family password, exercising play date safety, awareness & distance training and the three things all children should know all tie in to form a family safety plan that is based upon prevention through education.

## THE FAMILY PASSWORD

According to the Kid Safe Network, one of the top lures used to abduct children is called the “emergency lure.” Predators will fake a crisis to trick kids into willingly going with them. For example, they will tell the child, “Your mom has been hurt and is in the hospital. I’ve been sent to take you to her.” To counteract this lure, one of the safety strategies I teach parents is the concept of having a “family password.”

In this case, the goal of the predator is to force a youngster (whose logic and reasoning skills are not yet fully developed) to make a judgment call and simultaneously prey on one of the child’s greatest fears: something bad has happened to mom or dad. Imagine if a child is approached on a day when mom is running a few minutes late for pick up. You now have a panicked child who cannot be counted on to make a well thought-out decision.

There is also the possibility that you may actually need to send a friend or neighbor to pick up your child from school or a sports practice due to a flat tire, traffic or something else unforeseen. In this instance, you need your child to trust someone so you can be assured he or she will be picked up and properly cared for without incident.

A simple solution to both of these scenarios is having a family password. The password is simply a pre-determined word that is only given out to people outside the family on a need-to-know basis. As with any password, it should be difficult to guess, but easy for your family to remember.

With the family password in place, if a child is approached by someone who attempts the emergency lure they can simply ask, “What is the password?” The child knows that the person may only be trusted if they supply the correct password. Please note, role playing and repetition are just as important as creating a family password.

In my experience, youngsters have difficulty applying the family password concept to a live situation without significant role playing. In other words, a child's first instinct is not to ask for the password when approached with a real crisis situation (even if they have been taught about the family password). However, with regular repetition and role playing, it will become an automatic response, which is our ultimate goal.

Remember: deciding on a family password, repeatedly quizzing your child on it, then role playing different situations where it might be used all lead to a much greater chance of success in the face of danger.

## AWARENESS & DISTANCE

Awareness and distance are our two most important safety skills. People young and old can learn to be more aware and how to create distance from potential danger.

According to recent data provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation:

**Every 22.2 seconds - a violent crime occurs**

**Every 30.9 minutes - a murder occurs**

**Every 1.2 minutes - a robbery occurs**

**Every 36.6 seconds - an aggravated assault occurs**

**Every 3.2 seconds - a property crime occurs**

**Every 14.4 seconds - a burglary occurs**

**Every 4.8 seconds - a larceny-theft occurs**

**Every 26.4 seconds - a motor vehicle theft occurs**

In any crime situation, the victim will fall into one of two categories: he or she will either have some idea of what to do to in order to survive and escape or no idea whatsoever - which category would you rather be in?

Awareness and distance are our two most important safety skills. People young and old can learn to be more aware and how to create distance from potential danger.

Walk purposefully, communicate calm and confidence. Protect your personal safe zone and trust your instincts. Re-alert yourself as you pass through doorways and entrances/exits. Practice using peripheral vision.

Develop a habit of raising your awareness and being sure you have full use of your hands and feet when moving in or out of a secure area. Have your faculties about you and focus your attention briefly on being in a safe and aware state of mind.

Evaluate entry areas to your home and garage. Consider locations that could hide an intruder from your view while entering or leaving your home. Consider removing shrubbery or lighting any location that could conceal an attacker. Use motion sensor lighting near doors or driveway access points.

Keep garage doors closed and locked. Remove remote door openers from vehicles regularly parked in your driveway.

Teach children the importance of Safe People and Safe Places. Show your children common safe places and how to recognize them – a policeman, a store clerk at the checkout counter, a Mom with children. Teach children how to recognize a safe place if they feel threatened – the checkout at a store, a group of well-dressed adults.

Try not to carry a purse, if you must, carry it securely under your arm. Never wrap the strap around your arm or enter a tug-of-war if a thief grabs your purse. You could be seriously injured.

Adults and children alike should avoid walking alone and stay away from dark walkways, stairwells and alleys. Learn to avoid short-cuts that take you from the public view. Teach children how to say “No” to adults asking them for help. Adults should ask other adults, not children, for directions, help with packages or for other assistance.

Consider your return approach when you park your car. Pass up parking spaces in corners and without a clear view from several angles. Stalkers generally attack on your return to the car when you are distracted, your arms are full and they have evaluated you as a target.

Learn and teach loved ones the importance of maintaining a safe distance in any situation. Experts teach three primary safe zones – about 20 feet, about 10 feet and reaching distance. At each of these distances we can develop effective safety responses to danger or aggression.

Have a “safety drill” rehearsed with your children to escape danger or safely lock them in the car if you are threatened. Practice this drill just as you would practice a fire drill in a school or business. Teach loved ones there is always a safer place to be if danger presents itself.

Glance into your backseat and floorboards before entering your car. Always lock your doors whether you are in or out of your vehicle, or home. Keep windows at least partially rolled up to avoid someone reaching in to unlock and open your door.

Keep your purse, wallet or briefcase on the floor or under the seat at all times. Do not leave any packages, packs or bags in your parked and locked car even if they don't contain valuables.

If you are bumped from behind by another vehicle, do not immediately exit your car. **ASSESS THE SITUATION.** If you feel uneasy, remain in your vehicle until police arrive. If the other party leaves the scene note vehicle description and tag – do not follow.

If someone threatens you with a weapon, give your vehicle up immediately after you collect your children. **DO NOT FIGHT OR ARGUE.** Your life is more important than your car.

If your car breaks down, raise the hood to signal for help. If possible remain in your car. If someone stops to assist you, have them call for help. Do not allow strangers inside your vehicle and do not accept a ride from them.

Remember, awareness and distance remain the two most important safety skills for people of all ages!

## SECTION 4: ALL-SEASON SAFETY

### HALLOWEEN SAFETY

Halloween is a fun and exciting time of year for children. Here are some recommendations to help ensure they have a safe holiday!

- 1.) Choose a Halloween costume that is fireproof and affords full visibility. If the costume includes props of any kind, be sure they are smooth and flexible and do not create a fall or poke hazard. Use reflective tape on wrists or ankles to add sparkle to any costume. Flash lights also make a great prop.
- 2.) Look for Halloween events that do not involve a house-to-house trick or treat. Times are not what they once were. Most communities, high school recreation centers and activity programs host great Halloween events. Some communities even host trick-or-treating in the downtown between certain hours or close off low-traffic residential areas.
- 3.) Always have children trick or treat in groups and use a one-to-one buddy system within the group, even for teens. Talk to children and teens before house to house activities about how to maintain their safety. For example, kids should know to only trick or treat at houses with front porch lights on and always stick with their buddies. Make sure they know never to go into a house - even for a moment. Advise them to be polite, but do not allow any person to touch, hold or pick them up. Kids should never trick or treat alone.
- 4.) Encourage youngsters to be careful around pets and other animals. Pets are easily over excited and costumes often spook otherwise calm animals. Children should be very cautious around animals when in costume and never reach out for them when masked.

- 5.) Cross the street at corners and look both ways before crossing. Remind children and teens to walk away from the edge of bushes and avoid dark spots on streets, at alleyways and anyplace someone could lay in wait. Teach children how to present a personal fence to draw attention and how to say "Stay Back!" or "Leave Me Alone!" Teach children how to "Go Crazy" if they are grabbed by a stranger.
  
- 6.) Don't assume the right of way. Motorists may have trouble seeing trick or treaters. Just because one car stops, doesn't mean others will!
  
- 7.) Remind kids not to eat any treats until a responsible adult has inspected them. Consider providing your youngsters with some "safe" candy from home to snack on while they are trick or treating, so they are not tempted to violate this rule.
  
- 8.) Teach children to avoid any candy that has loose wrappings, is unwrapped, has puncture holes, or is homemade.
  
- 9.) Be aware that kids under four shouldn't have popcorn or hard candy - both are choking hazards.
  
- 10.) If you plan on welcoming trick or treaters at your door, check the porch and any part of the yard that trick or treaters will use. Remove hazards kids could trip over like garden hoses, toys, bikes and lawn decorations. Sweep leaves off sidewalks and from steps and make sure surfaces are not slippery. It's wise to restrain pets that might jump on or bite a child.

## HOLIDAY SEASON SAFETY

### Vehicle and Travel Safety:

- Be prepared for emergency situations on the road by having a winter “survival kit” in your vehicle. This kit should include items such as, a working flashlight, extra batteries, reflective triangles, road flares, tow rope, a compass, a first aid kit, exterior windshield cleaner, battery booster cables, an ice scraper, a snow brush, wooden stick matches in a waterproof container, and non-perishable, high energy foods like canned nuts, dried fruits and granola bars.
- Naturally, you should avoid driving during a storm, but if you must, keep your fuel tank full to avoid a frozen fuel line in your vehicle.
- Always let someone know where you are going, which route you are planning to take, and your timetable for arrival.

### Freezing Weather Safety:

- Dress in layers for warmth. When the weather is freezing outside, consider dressing in several thin layers as opposed to one single heavy coat, as layers will keep you warmer.
- Be sure to wear a hat (preferably one that covers your ears). Half your body heat loss can come from your head.
- Mittens, snug at the wrist, are better than gloves for warmth.
- Outer garments should be tightly woven, water repellent, and hooded.

### Child Safety:

- Remember that the homes you visit for the holidays may not be childproofed. Keep an eye out for danger spots.
- Traveling, visiting family members, getting presents, shopping, etc., can all increase your child's stress levels. Trying to stick to your child's usual routines, including sleep schedules and timing of naps, can help you and your child enjoy the holidays and reduce stress.
- Keep a laminated list with all of the important phone numbers you or a baby-sitter are likely to need in case of an emergency. Include the police and fire department, your pediatrician and the national Poison Help Line, 1-800-222-1222.

- ⦿ The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that you dress infants and young children in one more layer of clothing than an adult would wear in the same conditions.

### **Christmas Tree Safety:**

- ⦿ Place your tree away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources. Make sure the tree does not block foot traffic or doorways.
- ⦿ Avoid placing breakable tree ornaments or ones with small, detachable parts on lower branches where small children or pets can reach them.
- ⦿ If you have an artificial tree, choose one that is tested and labeled as fire resistant. Artificial trees with built-in electrical systems should have the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label.
- ⦿ -Only use indoor lights indoors (and outdoor lights only outdoors). Check lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, and loose connections. Replace or repair any damaged light sets. Use no more than three light sets on any one extension cord.
- ⦿ Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping hazards, but do not run cords under rugs, around furniture legs or across doorways. Turn off all lights on trees and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house. Unplug extension cords when not in use.

### **Fireplace Safety:**

- ⦿ Before lighting any fire, remove all greens, boughs, papers, and other decorations from fireplace area and check to see that the flue is open.
- ⦿ Do not burn gift wrap paper in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely. Don't place wrapped packages or gift boxes near the fireplace because they are highly combustible.
- ⦿ Keep all combustible materials at least 3 feet away from heat sources such as fireplaces, candles, and portable heaters. Be sure your home has working smoke alarms on every level.
- ⦿ Be sure the batteries in your carbon monoxide detector are changed annually.
- ⦿ Dispose of ashes with great care to assure that a fire will not start due to hot ashes.

## HOLIDAY SHOPPING SAFETY

With just a little bit of care and awareness your family is sure to enjoy a wonderful and safe holiday season!

It's the most wonderful time of the year! Let's keep it that way by staying healthy and safe this holiday season. Once Black Friday has officially kicked off the holiday shopping season, many of us will be hitting shopping centers and malls in search of good deals on gifts for friends and family.

Statistics show that crime typically increases during and after the holiday season. This is because more people with cash, gifts, gift cards, etc. are out and about, which presents more opportunities for the criminal looking for an easy score.

## CRIMES OF OPPORTUNITY

Crimes of opportunity are those resulting from spontaneous, unlawful action due to a situation that presents itself without prior planning. Such acts have little or no premeditation. For example, a criminal who notices a vehicle in an isolated section of a parking garage filled with shopping bags and then takes the opportunity to break into the vehicle to steal the contents is committing a crime of opportunity.

Our main goal is to avoid providing an easy opportunity for criminals. Here are some ways to avoid being targeted during holiday shopping trips:

- 1.) Shop during daylight hours whenever possible. If you have to shop at night, go with friends or other family members. Avoid shopping alone at night.
  
- 2.) Avoid wearing expensive jewelry or anything that would attract unwanted attention from a potential mugger or thief.
  
- 3.) When approaching your car check to see if anyone is hiding underneath the vehicle. It is possible for someone to hide under your vehicle and grab you as you get in. There have also been cases of assailants using a knife or other weapon to slash or attack their victim's leg from under the vehicle, making it difficult to run or fight back.

4.) Don't carry too many packages at once. It is important to have clear visibility and freedom to move. Consolidate your purchases into a small number of bags. Do not make it appear that you have purchased a large number of items.

5.) Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. Pay with a credit card, check or electronically instead.

6.) ALWAYS stay alert. Be on the lookout for anyone in the vicinity of your vehicle that is acting strangely. People do not typically hang around parking lots or parked cars, particularly if they are not carrying any packages, do not have their keys out, etc. Return to the store immediately if you see any suspicious activity near your car.

7.) Tell a friend or family member when and where you're going, and when you're expected to return.

8.) Do not purchase items from non-licensed solicitors in parking lots. The goods being offered are often counterfeit or stolen. Even more dangerous, these types of deals are often a set-up for a mugging or robbery attempt.

9.) Make sure any valuables are out of sight or locked in your trunk. Remember, iPods, cell phones, laptop computers, GPS systems and other small electronic devices are a car burglar's dream.

10.) If you see something, say something! Contact mall security or your local police department if you witness any suspicious or criminal activity while doing your holiday shopping. If you need immediate response, or anticipate personal safety could be a legitimate concern, call 9-1-1 immediately. And never, ever attempt to investigate suspicious activity on your own. Contacting mall security or police if you witness odd behavior – like someone wiggling the door handles on a vehicle – can help prevent potential crimes like car burglaries and auto theft.

Finally, I want to offer a word of caution on one safety tip that has been taught to people for years, particularly in women's self-defense courses. It is often recommended that you have your keys ready, in your hand, prior to leaving the store you are shopping in. A few years ago, I learned of a case where the FBI had apprehended a criminal who had abducted and subsequently murdered nearly thirty women across the country over the span of several years. He had approached all his victims in mall parking lots. When the Federal agents were interviewing this career criminal, they asked him how he went about selecting his victims. He stated that he looked for women who had car keys in their hand because that meant they were not being picked up by anyone and were alone. I do think it is a good idea to have your keys (or key fob) in your hand, just keep that hand in a pocket or out of plain view.

If you are unable to follow these suggestions, I recommend doing your holiday shopping online with reputable websites in order to avoid putting yourself at risk.

## KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE THIS SUMMER

There is no such thing as a burglar-proof home, but there are steps that can be taken to deter burglars.

When Memorial Day and the beginning of summer approaches, families will be heading out of town for everything from weekend beach getaways to longer term summer travels.

According to FBI data, the number of home break-ins and burglaries increase significantly during the summer months. Victims of home burglaries lose an average of \$1,700 in cash or possessions.

Below are some safety tips to keep your family's home safe when you are enjoying a little rest and relaxation. Although there is no such thing as a burglar-proof home, there are steps that can be taken to deter burglars from choosing your home and focusing on an easier target.

## **TIP #1: DON'T ANNOUNCE VACATION PLANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES.**

Avoid posting anything on Facebook or other social media about leaving town or going on vacation. Although this seems obvious, sometimes folks are so excited about an upcoming trip they fail to consider the potential security consequences of making such plans public.

## **TIP #2: DON'T ALLOW YOUR HOUSE TO APPEAR VACANT.**

Don't let newspapers pile up, your yard to go un-mowed, or mail and advertisements to go uncollected. These are all signs that no one is home. Have a friend or trusted neighbor tend to your mail and keep an eye on your yard while you are away.

## **TIP #3: LIGHT UP YOUR PROPERTY AT NIGHT AND USE TIMERS INDOORS.**

Studies show that an illuminated property is less likely to be burglarized. Indoors it's best to have two or three rooms equipped so the lights go on and off at random times. It is also a good idea to leave a light in the kitchen on all the time, as the kitchen is one room that tends to have lights on most frequently.

## **TIP #4: CONSIDER HIRING A HOUSE SITTER.**

The best way to make sure your home is safe while you are away is to have someone you trust living in it. If you don't have a conscientious relative or friend that is available, you can hire a house-sitting service. Although this can be a somewhat pricey option, it assures that all your bases are covered.

## **TIP #5: MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS LOCKED UP.**

Check that all doors and windows are secure and locked. It may seem obvious, but often in a rush to leave, this can be overlooked. More than 40 percent of residential burglaries are not forced entries. This means that a burglar was able to enter through a door or window that was left unlocked.

If you have a security system, make certain that it is set and all zones are armed. Many systems now offer enhanced security modes for when you are away. Don't forget to notify your alarm monitoring company (and the police) that you will be away.

### TIP #6: REMOVE YOUR SPARE KEY.

If a burglar figures out you're away on vacation, it's likely that they will check your porch for a spare key. So, if you keep a spare key under the mat, above the door frame, or in the flower pot – remove it!

### TIP #7: MAKE A HOME SECURITY CHECKLIST.

In order to be certain you have not forgotten to complete any of these steps it is best to make a check-list of things to do before you walk out the door. It takes five minutes or less and will help ensure you do not skip any important steps in securing your home. Making a list may also help remind you of important non-security related tasks such as leaving food for the cat or watering the houseplants.

## SUMMER SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR KIDS

According to a study by the National Safe Kids Campaign, the four month period from May through August is the most dangerous time of year for children with nearly 3 million medical emergencies reported each year!

As the weather starts to turn warmer and the school year begins to wind down, it's a great time to review the following rules of safety with your youngsters.

- 1.)** Always CHECK FIRST with your parents or the person in charge before you go anywhere or do anything. Be sure to CHECK IN regularly with your parents or a trusted adult when you're not with them.
- 2.)** Always TAKE A FRIEND when you play or go somewhere. It's safer and more fun.
- 3.)** Don't be tricked by people who offer you special treats or gifts. Never accept anything from anyone without your parents' permission.

- 4.)** Stay **SAFE** when you're home alone by keeping the door locked; not opening the door for or talking to anyone who stops by unless the person is a trusted family friend or relative, you feel comfortable being alone with that person, and the visit has been pre-approved by your parents. Never tell anyone who calls that you're home by yourself. Have a neighbor or trusted adult you can call if you're scared or there's an emergency.
- 5.)** Never go into a public restroom by yourself.
- 6.)** Never go alone to malls, movies, or parks. Take a friend with you, and always **CHECK FIRST** with your parents to make sure it's okay.
- 7.)** Don't panic if you feel lost. Identify the safest place to go or person to ask for help in reuniting you with your family. Never search for them on your own, and never go off alone with anyone who is trying to reunite you with your family.
- 8.)** Be careful when you play. Stay away from pools, lakes, and other bodies of water unless you are with an adult. Don't play near busy streets or deserted areas, and never take shortcuts unless you have your parents' permission.
- 9.)** Don't wear clothes or carry items with your name on the outside, and don't be confused just because someone you don't know calls out your name.
- 10.)** Don't get into a car or go near a car with someone in it unless you are with your parents or a trusted adult. Never take a ride from someone without **CHECKING FIRST** with your parents.
- 11.)** Be careful playing or riding your bicycle as it gets dark. Sometimes it is difficult for people driving cars to see you. Wear reflectors and protective clothing if your parents say you can play outside after dark. **ALWAYS** wear a helmet!
- 12.)** Don't be afraid to say **NO** and **GET AWAY** from any situation that makes you feel uncomfortable or confused. **TRUST YOUR FEELINGS**, and be sure to **TELL** a trusted adult if something happens that makes you feel this way.

## BONUS SECTION: EDUCATING CHILDREN ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE

I know many parents who use Red Ribbon Week as an opportunity to reinforce the lessons taught to students to act in their own best interest when facing high-risk, low-gain choices and to resist peer pressure and other influences in making choices regarding alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.

I'd like to share a story that I like to use when speaking to youngsters about making proper choices about alcohol, drugs and tobacco. This fable has many variations and is believed to have originated between the 12th and 13th century, though the exact origin is unknown. I have found that the tale provides an excellent segue into talking to children about the importance of making the right choices and trusting their judgment.

### THE SCORPION AND THE FROG

One day, a scorpion looked around at the mountain where he lived and decided that he wanted a change. So he set out on a journey through the forests and hills. He climbed over rocks and under vines and kept going until he reached a river.

The river was wide and swift, and the scorpion stopped to reconsider the situation. He couldn't see any way across. So he ran upriver and then checked downriver, all the while thinking that he might have to turn back.

Suddenly, he saw a frog sitting in the rushes by the bank of the stream on the other side of the river. He decided to ask the frog for help getting across the stream.

"Hellooo Mr. Frog!" called the scorpion across the water. "Would you be so kind as to give me a ride on your back across the river?"

"Well now, Mr. Scorpion! How do I know that if I try to help you, you won't try to *kill* me?" asked the frog hesitantly.

"Because," the scorpion replied, "If I try to kill you, then I would die too, for you see I cannot swim!"

Now this seemed to make sense to the frog. But he asked, "What about when I get close to the bank? You could still try to kill me and get back to the shore!"

"This is true," agreed the scorpion, "But then I wouldn't be able to get to the other side of the river!"

"Alright then... how do I know you won't just wait until we get to the other side and THEN kill me?" asked the frog.

"Ahh...," crooned the scorpion, "Because you see, once you've taken me to the other side of this river, I will be so grateful for your help, that it would hardly be fair to reward you with death, now would it?!"

So the frog agreed to take the scorpion across the river. He swam over to the bank and settled himself near the mud to pick up his passenger. The scorpion crawled onto the frog's back, his sharp claws prickling into the frog's soft hide, and the frog slid into the river. The muddy water swirled around them, but the frog stayed near the surface so the scorpion would not drown. He kicked strongly through the first half of the stream, his flippers paddling wildly against the current.

Halfway across the river, the frog suddenly felt a sharp sting in his back and, out of the corner of his eye, saw the scorpion remove his stinger from the frog's back. A deadening numbness began to creep into his limbs.

"You fool!" croaked the frog, "Now we shall both die! Why on earth did you do that?"

The scorpion shrugged, and did a little jig on the drowning frog's back.

"I could not help myself. It is my nature. Plus, you knew what I was when you picked me up!"

Then they both sank into the muddy waters of the swiftly flowing river.

After the story, I'll ask the following questions:

*"Should the frog have trusted the scorpion?"*

*"Why did the scorpion say, 'You knew what I was when you picked me up?'"*

*"Why do you think the frog chose to pick up the scorpion even though he knew he was dangerous?"*

I then ask, "Do people who decide to try cigarettes (abuse drugs, etc.) know they are dangerous?"

This leads to a discussion on why people try things like tobacco, drugs, and alcohol even though they are aware of the dangers. Some of the reasons I like to discuss are:

**Peer pressure:** friends encourage them to try tobacco, drugs, or alcohol.

**Independence:** they see smoking, drinking, or taking drugs as a way of rebelling or showing independence.

**Curiosity:** a desire to “see for themselves” what these substances are like.

**Popular media:** television, movies, and even advertising glorify drinking and smoking.

**Boredom:** teens often need something to keep themselves occupied and may turn to drinking or drugs.

Obviously, speaking to your son or daughter about tobacco, drugs and alcohol is a very important and a very personal matter. My goal is simply to share a strategy that has been useful to me. As Bruce Lee said, “Absorb what is useful, discard what is not. Add uniquely what is your own.”

## CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the first step in keeping your family safe by reading this guide. My hope is that these tips and strategies will lead to the development of a comprehensive family safety strategy to keep your loved ones healthy and safe for years to come. Always use common sense and avoid places and situations that you know to be potentially dangerous. And remember, preparedness and prevention is still the best course of action.

## USEFUL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS:

**Kid-Safe Network:** [www.kidsafenetwork.com](http://www.kidsafenetwork.com)

**Center for Missing & Exploited Children:** [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)

**Family Watchdog:** [www.familywatchdog.us/](http://www.familywatchdog.us/)

**NetSmartz Kids:** [www.netsmartzkids.org/](http://www.netsmartzkids.org/)

**PBS Parents:** [www.pbs.org/parents/](http://www.pbs.org/parents/)

**Safe Kids Worldwide:** [www.safekids.org/parents](http://www.safekids.org/parents)

**CDC – Safety in the Home & Community:**  
[www.cdc.gov/parents/children/safety.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parents/children/safety.html)