

Ask the Chief

November 2012

Dear Chief: With the recent disappearance and murder of 10 year old Jessica Ridgeway in Westminster, what can local parents do to help keep their children safe from predators?

Dear Concerned Citizen:

Listed below is information I gathered from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (www.ncmec.org). This is an excellent website I encourage all parents to visit and become familiar with.

An analysis by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), shows that approximately 35 percent of attempted abductions of children in the last 7 years occurred when the child was going to and from school or school-related activities. Some of the common lures used included providing the child a ride, offering candy/sweets, asking the child questions, offering money or using an animal as a ruse. In 72 percent of incidents, the suspect was in a vehicle and approximately one-third of the attempted abductions occurred during 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., when children are least likely to be supervised.

NCMEC developed the following 10 safety tips

1. Teach your older children to always **TAKE A FRIEND** with them when walking or biking, and stay with a group while standing at the bus stop. Make sure they know which bus to ride.
2. Walk the route to and from school with your children, pointing out landmarks and safe places to go if they're being followed or need help. Teach your children they should **NEVER TAKE SHORTCUTS** and always stay in well-lit areas.
3. Even though there may be more safety in numbers, it is still not safe for younger children to walk to and from school, especially if they must take isolated routes anytime during the day or in darkness. Always provide supervision for your young children to help ensure their safe arrival to and from school.
4. Teach your children that if anyone bothers them, makes them feel scared or uncomfortable, they should trust their feelings and immediately get away from that person. Teach them it is ok not to be polite and **IT IS OK TO SAY NO**.
5. Teach your children that if anyone tries to take them somewhere, they should **RESIST** by kicking and screaming, trying to run away and **DRAWING ATTENTION** – and saying “This person is trying to take me away” or “This person is not my father/mother.”
6. Teach your children **NOT TO ACCEPT A RIDE** from anyone unless you have said it is ok in that instance. If anyone follows them in a vehicle, they should turn around, go in the other direction, and run to a trusted adult who may help them.

7. Teach your children that grownups should **NOT ASK CHILDREN FOR DIRECTIONS**, they should ask other adults.
8. Teach your children to **NEVER ACCEPT MONEY OR GIFTS** from anyone unless you have told them it is ok to accept in each instance.
9. Make sure the school has current and accurate emergency contact information on file for your children and confirm names of those authorized to pick them up.
10. Always know where your children will be. Teach your children to always **CHECK FIRST** before changing their plans before or after school. Teach your children to never leave school with anyone unless they **CHECK FIRST** with you or another trusted adult, even if someone tells them it is an emergency.

Finally, be cognizant that predators are drawn to areas children frequently gather or congregate. Places such as bus stops, parks, schools, and child friendly businesses are popular areas amongst child predators. Everyone is encouraged to notify the Alamosa Police Department immediately if you see someone who doesn't seem to belong in areas where kids are present. It's better to be safe than sorry; let's keep our kids safe!

Craig Dodd, Chief of Police