

**Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux
Office of Child & Youth Protection**

April – Child Abuse Prevention Month

What are the most important things parents should tell children about safety?

1. **Always check first** with a parent, guardian, or trusted adult before going anywhere, accepting anything, or getting into a car with anyone.
2. **Do not go out alone. Always take a friend** with you when going places or playing outside.
3. **Say no** if someone tries to touch you, or treats you in a way that makes you feel sad, scared, or confused. Get out of the situation as quickly as possible.
4. **Tell a parent, guardian, or trusted adult** if you feel sad, scared, or confused.
5. There will **always be someone to help** you, and you have the right to be safe.

What should a parent know when talking to a child about safety?

1. **Don't forget your older children.** Children aged 11 to 17 are equally at risk to victimization. At the same time you are giving your older children more freedom, make sure they understand important safety rules as well.
2. **Speak to your children in a manner that is calm and reassuring.** Children do not need to be frightened to get the point across. In fact, fear can thwart the safety message, because fear can be paralyzing to a child.
3. **Speak openly.** Children will be less likely to come to you about issues enshrouded in secrecy. If they feel that you are comfortable discussing the subject at hand, they may be more forthcoming.
4. **Do not teach “stranger danger.”** Children do not have the same understanding of “strangers” as adults; the concept is difficult for them to grasp. And, based on what we know about those who harm children, people known to children and/or to their families actually present greater danger to children than do “strangers”.
5. **Practice what you preach.** You may think your children understand your message, but until they can incorporate it into their daily lives, it may not be clearly understood. Find opportunities to practice “what if” scenarios.
6. **Teach your children that safety is more important than manners.** In other words, it is more important for children to get themselves out of a dangerous situation than it is to be polite. They also need to know that it is okay to tell you what happened, and they won't be tattletales.