

Health Happenings

May 2011

(A Monthly Newsletter by Mary Ann Kuehnel, RN, CYSS Nurse)

Sometimes you just have to get into "deep waters". May 25th is traditionally set aside as the "National Missing Children's Day". I'd like to write about child abduction, protection and how you, as primary caretakers of your children, can make a difference.

Statistics report that a child (in the United States) will be reported as "missing" every 40 seconds. How mind boggling is that? The only "good thing" these statistics report is that the vast majority of these cases are resolved within hours. Although there are three distinct types of kidnappings (family, acquaintance and stranger), I will be concentrating on "stranger kidnapping" in this article. You do have the ability to reduce the likelihood of child abduction by teaching your child the importance of stranger danger by following these guidelines from the Illinois State Police:

- Tell your children that strangers are not always evil looking. Let them know not to talk to adults they don't know and to check with you (or a trusted adult) immediately if they've been engaged in conversation. Child molesters gain a child's confidence by befriending a child, and asking them to help them in some way, i.e.: offering a reward for assistance; saying Mom or Dad have been hurt or need their help; or posing as an officer. They may also gain their trust by having minor contacts over several periods of time, such as greeting them hello. Make sure your child knows to tell you if a stranger is trying to befriend them.
- Realize children are most vulnerable when alone. Children shouldn't be outside their home by themselves, even for short periods of time. Consider organizing or joining a Neighborhood Watch program in your community and participating in obtaining a free child safety fingerprinting and DNA documentation kit made obtainable by local community services.
- Teach your child to stay away from cars. Vehicles are often times the means by which the abductor removes the child. Make sure you teach your child to never approach a vehicle unless they are absolutely sure they know the occupants. An abductor will entice the child to walk near their vehicle and then pull them inside. Tell your child to let you know if they ever see a vehicle following them on their normal walking routes.
- Consider role playing with your child. Act like a stranger and see how your child reacts. Teach them the proper way to respond: Run away. Yell loudly (saying exactly what is happening, i.e.: "Help, this is not my Mom or Dad.", "Help, I'm being kidnapped.", "Help, call the police."... If a child just screams, people may think they're only throwing a temper tantrum. Remember, the more you practice, the better your child will be at responding.
- Finally, report any suspicious activity immediately. Ask your child if he/she has talked to anyone new that day. This may help bring suspicious acts to light. If you do suspect suspicious activity, call your local law enforcement agency or the nearest Illinois State Police District and give them as much of the following information as possible: License Plate number and State, color of vehicle, body style, location and direction of travel and description of occupants. For a suspicious person report, try to iterate the following: race, sex, clothing, facial features, height, and weight.

Rest assured, we in CYSS recognize this fear and attempt to ease it by making it cognizant that all our facilities are under video surveillance at all times. By joining together, and collectively teaching your children the importance of stranger danger, we can help prevent these appalling crimes before they happen.