



"Serving Parents  
for 60 Years"

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**KEEPING CHILDREN  
SAFE – a positive  
approach**

## KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

Every now and then a tragic case hits the headlines of a child who has gone missing on his/her way to school. If the child is subsequently found dead, then everyone's attention is suddenly focussed on child safety, particularly on the journey to and from school. The foolproof safety system is for parents to accompany their child(ren) but this is not always possible or desirable. At some point between the ages of 5 and 18 a child has to take responsibility for him/herself. So what extra steps can be taken to help ensure children's safety?

One option is for schools to alert parents when a child does not arrive. Many schools already have a "truancy call" system designed to tell parents when children are playing truant. However, this has limited value as a safety-alert system. For example it does not kick in until the school has established who is absent without a known reason. It uses an automated calling system (the school office does not have the capacity to make such calls) and if the parents are out or have mobile phones switched off, they do not get the message until later.

Another problem is that alert messages can be left on the wrong phone as parents sometimes forget to tell the school changes in contact details e.g. home or mobile phone numbers. It is very important to keep schools up-to-date and it might be a good idea to keep a note of the information you have given the school pinned up somewhere as a reminder to let them know of any changes.

However, another important action is to **safety-proof your child**. Most people tell their children not to talk to strangers, not to get into people's cars, and to come straight home; but it is equally important to give children **positive** actions that they **can** take to look after themselves. Imagine being lost with nothing but a list of "don't dos" to go by! We have come up with the following checklist of "to dos". You may want to discuss these and come up with your own list for parents and children at your school.

1. **Stay with your friends** especially in the evening. This is equally good advice whether the child is eight, eighteen or on a gap year overseas.
2. If your child feels threatened by a situation/person, tell them to go into a shop/approach people working publicly e.g. dustmen/police or parents with other children/or go to a house. **Children must not be afraid of all adults.**
3. **Stay in a public place.** Only walk on well-populated streets, even if it makes the journey longer. Don't take short cuts. Discuss with your children any areas that you feel are potentially dangerous and make these "no-go" areas.
4. Discuss **possible scenarios** with your child but in a positive way; i.e. what would you do if.....
5. Most parents have a "**worry-time**", particularly for teenagers. This is the gap between when you expect them home and when you start phoning the hospitals. Make sure that they understand this; that you are not trying to limit what they do but that you do need to know where they are. Youngsters are usually quite tolerant of their parents' panics, are mortified/ embarrassed at the thought that you've phoned the hospital, so can be quite co-operative!
6. Make sure you **know who their friends are** (surnames and home phone numbers, not just nicknames!) but emphasise why you need to know and that you are not checking up on them.
7. Whilst most youngsters have mobile phones, these do not always work, so make sure they **know how to use pay phones**, have the necessary money (currently 40 pence) and money for a bus.
8. And finally, **don't panic**. This problem has always existed. Most adults can remember getting safety warnings from their parents and the risks are not significantly worse today than they were in the past.
9. **YOUR OWN SAFETY TIPS**

### **Other SPTC leaflets available**

1. Running a Disco – advice on safe practice
2. Fundraising Ideas
3. A Simple Guide to Money Matters
4. The Qualifications Mystery Tour – a simple guide for parents
5. Advertising and sponsorship in schools – Nine things to consider
6. Charities, Constitutions and Confusion – a simple guide to charitable status

## **ABOUT S.P.T.C.**

You may be interested to know that our membership insurance scheme covers:

- Public Liability
- Personal Accident
- Fidelity Guarantee
- Employer's Liability
- Extended Public Liability for hired-in entertainers
- All-Risks (for equipment purchased by the PTA/Parent Council)
- Short-term all-risks insurance for special events.

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**Scottish Parent Teacher Council**, the independent voice of parents, is a national organisation. It has been serving parents' groups in schools for 60 years. For further information and membership forms:-

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