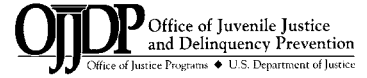


Tips To Help Keep Children Safer While in Care



General Tips

- Based on their age and developmental level, teach children in your care their full names; the full names of their mother, father, guardian(s), or foster parent(s); their address; their telephone number(s); and emergency contacts as soon as possible. In this list include **TRUSTED ADULTS** the children may contact if they need assistance including their caseworker. If they do not have a photo identification card, make one for them to carry or be placed in a safe spot within their clothing such as a shoe or special pocket. The child welfare agency or childcare facility may retain a copy.
- Provide appropriate adult supervision of children in your care. Know where they are at all times, know the adults who have access to them, and inquire if a background check has been completed on these individuals.
- Make sure you have a current head-and-shoulders color photograph of each child in your care in which the face is clearly visible. Update the photo every six months or more often if the child's appearance changes such as due to loss of a tooth or a change in hair style.
- Be sensitive to any changes in the children's behavior or attitude. **Encourage open communication and learn how to be an active listener. Look and listen to small cues and clues indicating something may be troubling them. Children are not always comfortable disclosing disturbing events or feelings, so be patient and nonjudgmental.**
- Caution children about using online computers and other Internet services including being careful about those they give personal information to, what kinds of information they share, and not agreeing to meet with anyone they don't know in person. Establish rules and guidelines for computer use and monitor their computer activities. Spend time with them on the computer, learning their favorite websites and determining those they communicate with online. Remind them that people "met" online are not their "friends" and they should only be communicating with people they know in person.
- Respect children's wishes regarding displays of affection. Children have the right to reject displays of affection if they feel uncomfortable about them. Remember, not every child comes from a background in which affection is openly or appropriately displayed.
- If a child in your care is missing, do an immediate search of the home, facility, vehicle(s), and surrounding area. If the child is not immediately located, contact local law enforcement to make a missing-child report and the child welfare or licensing agency. There is no waiting period to report a missing child to law enforcement and have information about a missing child entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database.¹ Also contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children[®] at 1-800-THE-LOST[®] (1-800-843-5678).

Foster Care

- Secure as much information as possible about the children in your care from their caseworker including information about biological parents; information about the children's likes, dislikes, strengths, and fears; indications of sexual exploitation, abuse, or neglect; and information about special needs and behavioral concerns. Maintain regular contact with each child's caseworker, ask for photo identification prior to releasing the children or divulging information to any caseworker, and record that caseworker's name and contact information.
- Foster children in your care may have been sexually exploited, abused, or neglected, so a determination needs to be made as to how discipline of these children is handled, by whom, under what circumstances it is used, and what form it takes. States can strictly prohibit any form of physical discipline and limit the other types of disciplinary measures that may be used. Children should never be humiliated or frightened as a form of discipline nor should discipline be severe. Children should not be deprived basic needs such as food, rest, or restroom privileges.

- Take children in your care on a walking tour of the neighborhood, and make sure children are properly supervised at all times, particularly when they are outside. Teach them
 - Surrounding streets and main roads by name and landmark
 - To stay on main roads and never take shortcuts
 - Safe places they may go for assistance if they need help
 - Neighbors who could help them

- Make sure you know where each of the children in your care is at all times. Know their friends and be clear with them about the places and homes they may visit. Make it a rule for your children to check-in with you when they arrive at or depart from a particular location and when there is a change in plans.

- Be involved in your children's activities. **As an active participant you'll have a better opportunity to observe how the adults in charge interact with children.** Know the adults who have access to children in your care. Determine if a background screening, including criminal history checks, has been completed on anyone in regular contact with them.

- Building a relationship is based on trust, and children in foster care may not be able to trust initially. Relationships take time, so be patient.

Childcare Providers

- Make sure children are supervised at all times, and release children from care only to people who have been authorized in advance. Institute a sign-in and sign-out procedure and consider installing a keyless entry system and security cameras to document anyone who enters or exits the building. Maintain a copy of custody and other legal documents that designate who may pick up and have access to each child.

- Make sure there is proper supervision of the children on the playground. All areas of the playground should be visible and monitored by staff members. Report any suspicious people you notice hanging around the playground area to the proper authorities.

- Provide appropriate adult supervision of children during naps. Children may be more at risk during naptime because other children are sleeping, the room is darkened, and other staff members may be out of the room. Watch for any sexual or aggressive acting-out behavior of children, particularly to other children, at this time.

- Review the physical layout of the facility making sure doors, windows, and gates are secure. Make sure other access points are not hidden by foliage or landscaping.

- Review the physical layout of the bathroom and make sure the restrooms do not contain areas where children may be isolated. It is recommended half-doors or doors with the upper half glass be installed to allow adults to supervise the children while still providing privacy to the children. Determine staff responsibilities regarding accompanying children to the restroom, for what purposes, at what times, and at what ages and stages.

- Make a list of anyone interacting with children in addition to the childcare provider and staff members such as bus drivers, janitors, dance or music instructors, and relatives of the childcare provider. Make sure each child's contact with such people is limited and supervised. Background screening of these individuals should be completed before they work with or have contact with the children.

- Establish a safe room for staff members and children to go to in case of a lockdown situation. Make sure all staff members have been trained concerning procedures during a lockdown and regular reviews are conducted.

¹ The National Child Search Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 5779 and 5780 of 1990) mandates no federal, state, or local law-enforcement agency will establish or observe a waiting period before accepting a missing-child case and all agencies will enter these reports into the National Crime Information Center database without delay. The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 (Pub. L. No. 109-248) mandates entry must now be made by law enforcement within two hours of receipt of a report of a missing or abducted child.