

NEWS RELEASE



GARDEN CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Back to School Safety Series – Part Four

Stranger Safety

This is the final article in the Garden City Police Department's four-part **Back to School Safety Series**. Over the past several weeks, we have covered **Safe Driving Practices, School Bus Safety, and Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety**.

Our final article focuses on **Stranger Safety**. Parents, grandparents, guardians, and teachers are encouraged to use these tips as an opportunity to talk with children about staying safe, making good decisions, and knowing where to turn for help.

Back to School Stranger Safety

One of the most important things we can teach children is that people who may pose a danger do not necessarily "look dangerous." They can look like anyone else. Children should understand that a stranger is simply someone they do not know or do not know well.

Rather than frightening children, parents and caregivers should have calm, age-appropriate conversations about what to do if someone makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Practice Makes a Difference

Consider role-playing different situations with your child. Someone might offer them candy, ask them for help, ask them to come see a puppy, or try to convince them to go somewhere with them.

Teach children that it is okay to say "**NO!**", move away, and find a trusted adult. Practicing these situations can help children feel more confident and prepared if they ever encounter an uncomfortable situation.

Trust Your Instincts

Teach children to listen to that feeling in their stomach when something does not seem right. If someone or something makes them feel uncomfortable, they should **move away and tell a trusted adult**.

Children should also understand that they will not get in trouble for telling an adult about something that made them uncomfortable or afraid.

A Few Simple Safety Rules

- **Never accept a ride from someone you do not know or without permission from a parent or guardian.**
- **Never approach a vehicle or go with someone who asks you for help, directions, or assistance.** Adults should ask other adults for help.
- **Whenever possible, walk with a friend or group.** There is safety in numbers.
- **Carry a cell phone when appropriate** so you can contact a parent, guardian, or 911 in an emergency.
- **Have your house key ready** when approaching your home so you can enter without lingering outside.
- If you believe someone is following you, **do not go directly home.** Go to a trusted adult, a school official, a nearby business, a police officer, or another safe location and ask for help.
- If someone in a vehicle is bothering or following you, **move in the opposite direction of the vehicle and go to a safe location.** Do not engage with the occupants.
- If someone attempts to grab or take you, **make as much noise as possible.** Yell, scream, run, and attract the attention of people nearby. Do whatever you can to get away and get to a safe place.

Create a Family Password

Parents and guardians may want to establish a **family password** known only to family members.

Teach your children that if someone they do not know says that a parent or guardian sent them to pick them up, they should ask for the family password. If the person does not know it, the child should not go with them.

Remind children that the password should remain private and should not be shared with others.

If Something Doesn't Seem Right, Say Something

If your child sees something unusual or believes someone is watching, following, photographing, or attempting to contact them in an inappropriate manner, encourage them to **tell a parent, guardian, teacher, school official, or police officer immediately.**

If you report a suspicious person or vehicle, try to provide as much information as you can **without putting yourself or your child in danger.** Helpful information may include:

- Vehicle license plate number, make, model, and color.
- Description of the person, including approximate age, height, build, and other identifying characteristics.
- Clothing worn by the person.
- Hair color and length, glasses, hats, tattoos, scars, jewelry, or other distinctive features.
- Direction of travel and whether the person was on foot, bicycle, or in a vehicle.

Do not confront or follow a suspicious person or vehicle. Your safety should always come first. Call the police and allow officers to investigate.

Online Safety Is Stranger Safety, Too

Today, children can encounter strangers not only in their neighborhoods but also online. Parents and guardians should talk with their children about the importance of protecting personal information and recognizing inappropriate online behavior.

Consider the following guidelines:

- Keep computers and other internet-connected devices in common areas of the home when appropriate.
- Know which websites, apps, games, and social media platforms your children are using.
- Remind children not to share their full name, home address, telephone number, school name, passwords, or other personal information with people they meet online.
- Children should **never arrange to meet someone they met online** without a parent or guardian being involved.
- Teach children not to open messages, attachments, or links from people they do not know.
- Talk to your children about online chats, gaming platforms, and social media, and establish clear family rules for their use.
- Most importantly, let your children know that they can come to you if something they see or experience online makes them feel uncomfortable, confused, or unsafe.

The goal is not to frighten children or make them afraid of everyone they do not know. **The goal is to give them the knowledge and confidence to recognize unsafe situations, trust their instincts, and know what to do when they need help.**

The Garden City Police Department encourages parents and caregivers to take a few minutes to discuss these safety tips with their children. These conversations, along with the safety practices covered in the previous three articles, can help make the transition back to school a safe and positive experience for everyone.

If you missed any of the earlier articles in our **Back to School Safety Series**, copies are available at the Garden City Police Department.

The Garden City Police Department wishes all of our students, parents, teachers, and staff a safe, successful, and healthy school year!