

Operation Vigilance

General guidelines for parents of
children aged **0 to 6 years**





Founded in 1985, Enfant-Retour Québec provides front-line services to families who are searching for their missing child. Our staff accompanies, supports and counsels these families in the search for their child by working collaboratively with law enforcement agencies, other child search organizations, as well as the media.

In addition, Enfant-Retour Québec offers comprehensive educational and prevention programs designed especially for children, parents and professionals.

LEND YOUR EYES ... be the vision for missing children and join Operation Vigilance today!

Please visit our website at:
www.enfant-retourquebec.ca
or contact us at:
514.843.4333

Some parents hesitate to talk about personal safety with their child because they don't want to frighten him or diminish his spontaneity. However, giving your child the knowledge and practical skills he needs to look after himself are as important as teaching him to read and write.

The more confident and competent children are about keeping themselves safe, the more empowered they will be to deal with other challenging situations - in the classroom, in relationships with peers and later in the workforce. **We are providing children with skills for life.**

Advice on how to discuss personal safety

- Approach the subject in a positive and calm manner, the same way you would discuss fire emergency procedures or bike safety rules;
- Use simple and concise words, to which your child can relate;
- Give your child clear guidelines appropriate to his age and keep your conversation light and pleasant;
- Use everyday situations to either reinforce the safety concepts that you've already discussed or introduce additional rules as your child faces new challenges (i.e. walk in your neighbourhood, or going to the park without being accompanied by an adult).

It is through self-confidence that a child can assert himself and make sensible choices. Being scared and insecure makes children vulnerable. However, if we teach them at an early age how to assert themselves, to trust their own judgment and to say **NO!** when appropriate, they will find within themselves the resources needed to stay safe.



Fostering your child's self-esteem

Ways to foster your child's **self-esteem**:

- Tell your child several times a day that you love him;
- Demonstrate your love for your child through your actions as well as your words: a look, a gentle touch, a smile and positive reinforcement all show your child that he is precious to you;
- Try to notice the qualities that make your child unique and special. Praise him when he succeeds in accomplishing new skills and encourage him to develop new abilities;
- As your child grows and develops, reassure him of your unconditional love, although at times his behaviour may be unacceptable to you;
- Create a trusting and open relationship with your child. Talk to him and listen attentively to his needs. Remind him to never hesitate to confide anything that makes him feel uncomfortable or embarrassed.

A fundamental rule: Always supervise young children

Never leave children under the age of 7 unattended in any public place, including public washrooms, in a vehicle or stroller, not even for a minute. A few seconds is all it takes for a child left alone to disappear.



As early as 1 or 2 years old: The alarm system

When your child signals you verbally or physically that a contact touch makes him feel uncomfortable, respect his right to say NO! Let him decide the physical proximity with which he is comfortable. Your child will gradually learn to trust his instincts (his internal alarm system) and to identify the body signals that warn him to avoid any situation or person that makes him feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or scared.

As early as 3 or 4 years old: Where to find help

Identify safe places in your neighbourhood where your child can obtain help or seek refuge: Block-Parent houses, stores, public buildings, restaurants, houses of people you trust, etc. Teach him also how to use 911 in case of emergency.

As early as 2 or 3 years old: His personal information

Teach your child his name, address and phone number, his age, date of birth, your complete names (not only Mom and Dad) and the numbers where you can be reached at all times. You can compose a playful rhyme that includes this personal information to be used in the event of an emergency. Have fun practicing your rhyme by incorporating it into your daily activities (i.e. while driving the car, preparing supper, etc.).

As early as 4 or 5 years old: Asking for permission

Teach your child to always ask for your permission before going somewhere, following someone, getting into a car or accepting a gift, even from a family member or a close friend. Explain to him that it is important that you always know where he is, who he is with and what he is doing in order to provide him with help in case of an emergency.

Selecting childcare providers

At the daycare

- Make sure the daycare records daily attendance and immediately advises you of any absence;
- Always tell your child who will be picking him up. Plan alternative arrangements in case any unexpected situations arise;
- Identify your child's personal belongings with a symbol on the outside. Write his name only on the inside. A child will be more likely to trust someone who calls him by name;
- Choose a quality daycare with trained educators who offer a stimulating environment;
- Help facilitate your child's integration and adaptation to his new environment by accompanying him during his initial visits. Plan to spend some time with him and get to know the educators.

At home

- Choose someone you trust such as a family member or an individual who has been highly recommended to you and always thoroughly check their references before entrusting your child's care to them;
- Prepare your child to be under the care and supervision of a new adult by gradually integrating this person into his life. Observe the quality of the interactions between the sitter and your child;
- Take the time to explain your child's daily routine and needs to the sitter. Be sure to post all your personal numbers by the telephone where you can be reached at all times;

Whether your child attends a daycare centre or is cared for in your home, be very attentive to what your child tells you at the end of the day and always trust your instincts ...



Shopping

- Shopping is not usually a fun activity for children; if possible, leave your child at home with someone you trust;
- Make sure to always carry proper identification of your child, such as an identification booklet or card (offered free of charge by *Enfant-Retour Québec*) as it includes a recent, quality photo of your child and will prove to be a valuable tool in the event that you are separated from your child;
- Upon arrival at the mall, identify with your child all the people and places where he can seek help if needed;
- Remind your child that he must stay within eyesight at all times;
- Never leave your children alone in a public place such as a toy store, video arcade, movie theatre or playground, expecting store personnel to supervise them. This is not their role and they are not trained in this area.

If you get separated from your child:

- Remain calm;
- Check your immediate surroundings;
- Go to the information booth to inform the clerk that you have lost your child and provide him with a photo of your child;
- The clerk will immediately initiate the proper emergency procedures while enlisting assistance from security personnel.

Make an outing to the mall a teachable moment by explaining to your child what he must do if he ever gets separated from you:

- Stay close to the spot where he became separated from you so it will be easier for you to find him;
- Ask the store clerk for help. This person is usually the one nearest the cash register and may wear a uniform and/or a nametag;
- Never leave the area to look for you, return to the car, or leave the shopping centre without you.



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