

Operation Vigilance

General guidelines for parents of
children aged **6 to 12 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.**

Always encourage your child to be safety-minded and praise him when he acts appropriately. Make your home a place of trust and support that fulfills your child's needs. Encourage your child to share any secrets that may leave him feeling uncomfortable or scared. Find daily opportunities to talk with your child and listen attentively to what he has to say.



Asking for permission

Your child must 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.

Establish an information/message centre in your house where you and your child can leave notes detailing where everyone is and when they will return.

The buddy system

Teach your child to always be in the company of at least one friend whenever he plays outside or goes anywhere. There is safety in numbers.

A safe distance

Make sure your child understands that he does not have to engage in conversations with adults that approach him and that he should always keep a safe distance of at least three giant steps between himself and someone he doesn't know or who makes him feel uncomfortable.

The alarm system

Encourage your child to always trust his internal alarm system, which lets him know when he has a bad feeling or feels uncomfortable, embarrassed or scared. Remind him that when his alarm system is triggered, he **always** has the right to say **NO!**, even to a family member or close friend.

The safety equation

Teach your child to ask himself the following 3 questions that will help him to make safe decisions in any situation:

1. Do I have a good feeling?
(alarm system)

2. Will my parents know where I am?
(asking for permission)

3. Will I be able to find help if I need it?
(buddy system)

If he answers **NO!** to any one of these 3 questions, he must say **NO!** and discuss the situation with you: **Remember 1 no = don't go!**



Safe places

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.

At school

- Make sure your child's school records daily attendance and immediately advises you of any absence;
- 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.

If your child walks to school

- Establish a safe route with your child when he travels to and from school and encourage him to always walk with a friend.

After school

- Your child should always know who will be picking him up;
- Plan alternative arrangements in case any unexpected situations arise. Choose a password that is known only to you and your child. Your child must always ask for this password before leaving with someone who claims to have been sent in your place.

Shopping

For younger children

- Make sure to always carry proper identification of your child, such as an identification card or booklet (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;
- Remind your child that he must stay within eyesight at all times;
- When your child uses public washrooms, wait by the door and monitor the length of time he is gone;
- 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.

For older children

If you feel your child is mature enough to go to the mall without the supervision of an adult, take some time to discuss and set firm guidelines that will ensure his safety:

- Always use the buddy system;
- Make sure he knows how and where to reach you at all times;
- Be sure to teach him how to handle money discreetly in public;
- Agree upon a set time and meeting place to pick him up.

Home alone

Before delegating the responsibility of self-care to your child, you must first ask yourself if you have provided your child with the skills and information necessary to respond to any given situation. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is he mature enough to respect established rules?
- Is he able to problem-solve and make responsible decisions?
- Is he confident enough to react wisely to emergency situations that might arise?

If you feel your child is ready for self-care, review the following rules with him:

- Never tell anybody that he is home alone;
- Lock all the doors and close the windows upon arriving home;
- Turn on a few lights as well as the radio or T.V.;
- Never open the door unless you have told him that someone is coming over;
- If he answers the phone, he must say that you are busy and ask if he can take a message;

- Remember to post emergency numbers by the phone: 911, your personal contact numbers (work, cellphone, pager), as well as those of other trusted adults;
- You may also want to invite a friend to come over to do homework or watch T.V. with your child.



Internet safety

Although the Internet is an inexhaustible resource and a valuable educational tool, it is important to sensitize your child to its potential dangers. To ensure that your child's on-line experience is a rewarding and satisfying one, establish specific safety rules (i.e. time of the day, duration of use and appropriate sites to visit).

- Place the computer in a common area, accessible to the entire family and supervise his on-line activities;
- Teach your child to **never** divulge personal information (his name, address or phone number, the name of his school) and to **never** send his photo;
- Instruct your child to **always** ask for your permission before arranging a face-to-face meeting with a cyber friend;
- Learn to identify the people with whom your child is communicating on the Internet. Monitor his activities in discussion groups and while exchanging e-mails. Make sure he uses a screen name that does not reveal his true identity;
- Install parental control software in order to limit your child's access to inappropriate material. Keep in mind that using filtering software and/or hardware can help to block a lot of inappropriate materials or sites, but it is not 100% fool-proof and is no substitute for good parental involvement;
- Encourage your child to share any information, conversation or incident that leaves him feeling uncomfortable or confused.





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