

Safety reminders benefit children

Kathrynne Skonicki/CNS

ROMEONVILLE, Ill. — A handful of highly publicized child abductions may have raised concerns among parents, but according to Sgt. Elizabeth Frances Smith, a community education/crime prevention officer for the Naperville Police Department, child abduction by strangers is a rare occurrence.

During a telephone interview with the *Catholic Explorer*, newspaper of the Joliet Diocese, Smith noted that children are more likely to be victimized by someone they know and trust rather than a stranger.

She explained that across the nation 99 percent of missing children are runaways; a noncustodial parent takes 90 percent of the remaining 1 percent.

But, she said, it is always a good idea to discuss the safety of one's child, and there are plenty of precautions that parents can take to protect their children.

For starters, she emphasized the importance of raising self-confident children.

"If a kid feels confident in their own instincts and attitudes, they are much more likely to not approach a stranger and to fight," she said, referring to the 7-year-old Philadelphia girl who chewed through duct tape to escape her kidnappers this past summer.

Smith also urged parents to talk to the children from the time that

they are 2 or 3 years old about what's appropriate behavior and what's not, explaining to them that whatever part of the body is covered by a swimsuit should not be touched.

Parents should also talk to children about safety concerns and make sure their children know that there will never be a stranger picking them up from school.

Smith suggested that any adult who is supervising a child should always have a recent photo with information such as hair color, eye color, height and weight. Parents should also place a photo in the glove compartment of the car.

She also emphasized the importance of teaching children to trust their "gut instinct."

"It's so hard because we want our children to be polite, good citizens," she said, but there are some people

they should avoid.

If something should occur and a child is missing, Smith said parents should call 911 immediately.

She endorsed school programs that make adults sign in and sign out when dropping off or picking up students and said schools should make students feel comfortable enough to be able to go back into the school and discuss an inappropriate encounter they had in the parking lot.

Mary Lloyd, principal of St. Walter School in Roselle, said her school instituted specific security precautions more than a decade ago. Signing preschoolers in and out and maintaining a single door for entrance and exit might seem like mundane tasks, but they have proven successful in preventing problems, she said.

As a principal for 14 years at the Roselle school, Lloyd said she starts off every school year by reminding parents and students that safety is a top priority.



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