

# Protecting Your Child from a Sexual Predator

By Tatiana Mahoney from [Parents Magazine](#)

Kidnapping is one of the scariest dangers parents face. How can you educate your kids and keep them safe from an abductor? Start with these five tips. By Tatiana Mahoney from [Parents Magazine](#)

## Games to Kidnap-Proof Your Child

Most often, sexual predators are people kids know. So how do you help them discern the good from the bad? These resources and tips -- some from organizations created by parents of high-profile kidnapping victims like Polly Klaas and Megan Kanka -- can help.

### 1. Test your child's safety IQ -- and yours

Does your child know who to ask for help if he's lost? Or what to do if a nice lady asks for directions? The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) offers online safety quizzes that make great educational tools -- for parents and kids. Do you know what to do if you suspect online "stalking" or sexual exploitation of a child? Go to their site and find out at [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

### 2. Use online games to practice "What would you do..." scenarios

There are lots of games (most for kids ages 5 to 17) that simulate online and day-to-day activities to help kids identify potential dangers. Use them as a springboard to teach your child how to handle them. Pretend you're a stranger on the phone, asking questions about when Mom and Dad come home from work. Would your child know what to say?

Here are some of the sites to check out:

- **NetSmartz.org**  
Meet Clicky, a cute robot that sings catchy rap songs to help kids memorize safety rules. He also stars in videos and games that show kids the right thing to do when approached by a stranger when online. NetSmartz is a joint program of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and Boys & Girls Clubs of America.
- **McGruff.org**  
McGruff is the dog from the National Crime Prevention Council that tells kids to "take a bite out of crime." Puzzles, slide shows, and games teach kids how to say "No!" to strangers and how to get home safely.
- **idthecreep.com**  
This game teaches kids how to identify the "creeps" on e-mail, chat, and IM. It simulates conversations tweens and teens might have, using different characters kids can select. This site is also from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and it's available in English and Spanish.
- **Wiredkids.com**  
Superheroes and cute cartoons are the spokespersons for four connected sites: [Wiredkids.org](http://Wiredkids.org), [InternetSuperHeroes.org](http://InternetSuperHeroes.org), [Katiesplace.org](http://Katiesplace.org), and [Teenangels.org](http://Teenangels.org) -- all

part of Wired Kids, a worldwide charity that offers information on how to keep children safe from online sexual exploitation. Let your kids check out their games and quizzes.

## Parental Controls and Training Programs

### 3. Use Parental Controls and make a safety pledge

Net Nanny Parental Controls, CYBERSitter, and Cyberpatrol are popular software that let you specify with which buddies your child can chat or e-mail and which sites are okay to visit. For a comparison chart, visit <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com>.

Once you have the right filtering system for your computer, print out a safety pledge you and your child can sign and post by your computer. Here's one from Safekids.com: <http://www.safekids.com/safekidscontract.pdf>.

### 4. Train them to fight back

A program called radKIDS, an offshoot of Rape Aggression Defense, trains kids ages 5 to 12 defense skills against abduction. (Screaming "Stay back, you're not my parent!" when sensing an attack is one of them.) Explain that they'll probably never have to use any of these techniques, but you want them to know what to do -- and that knowing these things will help them feel safer. To locate a program near you, visit [www.radkids.org/programs.html](http://www.radkids.org/programs.html).

**Next: [Be Prepared and Raise Awareness](#)**

## Be Prepared and Raise Awareness

### 5. Do some prep work -- just in case

Did you know it takes parents about two hours to gather all the information law officials need to find a missing child? Scary stat: According to the Department of Justice, 74 percent of the children murdered by non-family members are killed within the first three hours of abduction. Always keep pictures of your kids at hand, and consider using some of these tools to help you maximize this crucial time should the unthinkable occur.

- **Do-It-Yourself DNA Sampling Kit**  
There are several sites that offer them. Check out the one from the KlaasKids Foundation and the State of California DNA Laboratory at [www.klaaskids.org/pg\\_cs\\_dnakit.htm](http://www.klaaskids.org/pg_cs_dnakit.htm).
- **Child ID Kit**  
The National Alert Registry offers a free printable where you can include your child's photo, weight, height, and fingerprints. Visit <http://www.registeredoffenderslist.org/child-id-kit.pdf>.
- **AMBERstick**  
This is a USB flash drive where you can store your family's vital information, including photos, and carry it on your key chain. All the information is encrypted and secured with a password. If a family member goes missing, a police officer can plug it into his cruiser's computer USB port and transmit all the info to law enforcement -- even "Missing Person" flyers are automatically created. For more information, visit [www.codeamber.org](http://www.codeamber.org).

Many of the organizations and Web sites offering tools to keep kids safe from sexual predators were created in memory of missing kids. These are some of the young victims whose abductions helped change laws and raise awareness:

**Adam Walsh**

His dad, John Walsh, went on to create The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Web site: [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)

**Jacob Wetterling**

The case prompted the first-ever law to create a statewide sex-offender registry. Web site: [www.jwf.org](http://www.jwf.org)

**Polly Klaas**

This 1993 case led to the creation of tougher penalties for child predators. Web site: [www.pollyklaas.org](http://www.pollyklaas.org)

**Megan Kanka**

Her New Jersey neighbor -- a convicted sex offender -- kidnapped her in 1994. A law named for Megan requires state residents to be notified when a sex offender moves into the area. Web site: [www.megannicolekankafoundation.org](http://www.megannicolekankafoundation.org)

**Amber Hagerman**

The "Amber Alert" system designed to help find abducted children was created in her memory. Web site: [www.codeamber.org](http://www.codeamber.org)

**Elizabeth Smart**

Her parents have become active lobbyists for tougher sex-offender laws since her 2002 abduction.

**Jessica Lunsford**

A law in her name increased prison sentences and other penalties for sex offenders. Web site: [www.jmlfoundation.com](http://www.jmlfoundation.com)

**Shawn Hornbeck and Ben Ownby**

Both were allegedly nabbed by Michael Devlin. Hornbeck lived with his captor for four years before being found (along with Ownby). The case raised awareness of the dangers of child predators once again. Web site: [www.shawnhornbeck.com](http://www.shawnhornbeck.com)