

Safe Routes to Schools Safety Tips for Parents

How do you get your children ready to move safely through the world, ready to deal with the people they may meet? Here are 10 tips from Paula Statman, M.S.S.W., Director of KidWISE Institute, author of *Raising Careful Kids in a Crazy World* and designer of the *Best Feet Forward* workshops.

1. **Protect and teach your children.** Protect your children and teach them the skills they need to be safe and strong. Start by teaching your children that they have the right to be safe. Also, learn about the tough issues children face today, which may not be the same as those you faced when growing up.
2. **Prepare — don't scare — your children.** Teach yourself to share your fears with other adults rather than your kids. Teach what your children need to *learn* rather than what you think they should be afraid of. Do not use graphic words that put scary pictures in your children's heads. Instead, help them see themselves acting safely and not getting hurt.
3. **Use “teachable moments” to explain safety.** When you are out with your children, help your children learn how to deal with the problems and people they may meet. Here is a lesson that is easy to teach: Suppose you pass a postman, who says, “Hello.” Ask your children to say, “Hello,” so that they gain practice talking with a person in uniform in case they ever need help. Afterwards talk about why it is OK to talk to certain people and not to others. This is a better approach to teaching safety than saying, “Don't talk to strangers!”
4. **Help your children say, “No!”** We need to teach our children – who are taught to respect adults – that they have the right to say, “No!” to anyone who is acting odd, even if that person is an authority figure. This means we must teach them how to say, “No!” to a strange offer, stand up to a bully, and yes — say, “No!” even to us. Safe and strong kids know how and when to protect themselves.
5. **Teach your children to recognize, trust, and act on their instincts.** Help your children respond quickly if they have a gut feeling that something is not right. Tell them to trust their inner alarm more than what they see or hear. Their built-in warning system is never wrong and should guide their next steps.
6. **To teach children in kindergarten through second grade, suggest ideas for acting safely** when they play outdoors, walk to school, are in the park, or go to the store. They will need to hear and practice new safety skills many times to learn them. Other ways to help children learn safety rules are turning them into rhymes, making up songs, and drawing pictures about them.
7. **To teach children in third grade and up, ask them to suggest safe actions.** They are learning to solve problems, so ask them why something might be unsafe and then help them come up with the best – and safest – way to deal with it. This is a good age to begin using “What would you do if..?” questions to open your talks about safety.
8. **Track the safety skills your children are learning.** This will help you make smarter choices about how much supervision your children need, when to grant more freedom, when to say, “No,” and when to give them more practice while you are with them. It is best to teach a little bit at a time and repeat the lessons and practice sessions. This process makes it simpler for your children to learn, recall, and use new, safety skills.

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9. **Fight the urge to ground your children for life** when they do not practice safety when they should. Instead, discuss the gaps in their thinking — or your teaching. Then, supply the missing pieces. Ask them to tell you what they would change next time and practice with them so they have the chance to show what they have learned.
10. **Praise your children's progress** when they learn, recall, and choose safe behavior. When you see even a little bit of the desired actions, let your children know that they are on their way to becoming safe and strong kids! Our goal is to help our children show good behavior and judgment over and over, so that they can safely handle more freedom.