

KEEPING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFE

When things happen in our neighborhoods that disrupts our normal routine and turns our sense of security upside down, we are frightened, our children are frightened, and the media reinforces these fears. Here are some ways to bring order and a sense of security back to your family:

~Your children need to know that they are safe. Rather than telling them that they have 'nothing to worry about', let them know all the things that you do to insure their safety. Share with your children your safety plan for what to do if there ever is an emergency situation.

~As I have spoken to children in the past about safety plans, I am always amazed at the children who say they would grab a baseball bat and 'beat up the guy'. Children have active imaginations. They often hear a little bit of information and then fantasize themselves being the superhero that can save the day (as they witness on television and video games daily). Talk to your child about what would be a better idea – get a parent or another adult to help, call 911, activate the home alarm system, or call a neighbor.

~Children do not need to know ALL of the details. Tell them what they need to know, and answer their questions honestly. If they ask a question, before you answer, you might want to ask what they think. Clarify and correct any mis-information. That should be sufficient to satisfy their curiosity.

~When your children express fear, don't negate their feelings. It's easy to assure them that those things won't happen here, but help them understand that sometimes bad things happen. The important thing is that we can be prepared and know what we will do as a family to make sure we are all safe.

~If your children are home alone, be sure they would know what to do if an emergency situation occurs. TEACH them what to say or do and PRACTICE the plan. A few suggestions for latchkey kids from the book "How to Say It To Your Kids" by Dr. Paul Coleman is as follows:

~If you have caller ID on your phone, tell your children to answer only if they know who is calling. If they do answer, always say, "Mom is busy at the moment", and offer to take a message.

~Call 911 if you have any doubt about what to do. Here are the phone numbers for the neighbors who will be home. (If you have programmed numbers at home, make sure that your child understands that the speed dial number does not work outside the home and will require a real number if they are somewhere other than home.)

*Discuss ahead of time what your child plans to do when he arrives home. You should always know your child's home schedule. "Your plan is to call me when you get home, have a snack, do your homework, and maybe play a video game. I'll call you when I'm on my way home."

*Tell your children to do things inside the house and don't go outside unless previously arranged for adult supervision.

In such times as this when we fear for the safety of our family and friends, it's easy to lose not only our sense of security and safety, but also our common sense. When such disturbing things rock our world, over which we have no control, remember that we only have control over our actions....Actions teach!!

Have a SAFE week!

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