



CHILD ABDUCTION T.I.P.S. NEWSLETTER

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How Families Can Better Protect and Empower Children

by Erin Runnion, Founding Director
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As we approach the holiday season, it's important to discuss how we can collectively support our children in feeling safe and empowered. Most crimes against children are perpetrated by someone the family knows and trusts. Thus, when we speak openly about abuse and abduction prevention with our friends and family, we can significantly reduce the risk to our children.

Here's what you can do:

- 1) Discuss with your children the importance of their feelings.** If they ever feel uncomfortable, they should trust their instincts and express their discomfort openly. It is your job to protect them, but caring adults don't always know how a child is feeling, so it is important and brave to say something.
- 2) Talk with your child about how the adults in their life make them feel.** Agree on the 2 or 3 adults that you both trust to list on their 'emergency cards.' Explain that those are the only adults that they are ever allowed to go anywhere with unless they check with you and hear you say it is okay.
- 3) Create a CODE WORD or SIGN (or emoji for those with phones) that your child can use to tell or show you that they are uncomfortable.** Tell your child that if there is ever an emergency, and someone else must pick them up, you will tell the person the CODE so that your child will know that they have your permission. This can be a critical tool if there is an increased risk of abduction due to a custody dispute or other factor.
- 4) Make sure your children know they have the right to say "no" to any kind of touch that makes them uncomfortable.** Teaching our children about consent is crucial. It empowers them to understand that their bodies belong to them alone, and they have a right to set personal boundaries. The next step is to ensure that the adults in their lives allow them to practice that critical skill.

By working together, we can empower our children to protect themselves while fostering an environment of trust, respect, and open communication. Let's commit to being allies in this important mission, ensuring every child knows they have the right to say "no" and that their voices will always be heard.

**Thank you for your support and for being part of this important conversation.
Together, we can keep our children safe and protect their joy.**

*If you would like additional resources for empowering children to protect themselves, please visit <https://www.thejoyfulchild.org/>. You can download free skill-building worksheets organized by different age groups to help start these important conversations.

To download the full article, visit:
https://cirinc.org/file_download/3b9d8f5a-f628-4f43-a4cd-ca93e1ac1e38

Safeguarding Students: FERPA, Policies, and Response

by Jannell Violi, Coordinator
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When a child goes missing or is abducted, timely and coordinated action is imperative. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) plays a significant role in how schools collaborate with law enforcement and other agencies during investigations. FERPA is designed to protect the privacy of student education records, but it also provides exceptions that are critical in emergencies, such as when a child is missing.

FERPA permits schools to disclose a student's education records, without parental consent, to law enforcement officials, child welfare agencies, or other agencies during a health or safety emergency. This exception allows schools to provide critical information such as attendance records, emergency contact information, or details about a child's routine that may assist in locating the missing child. However, schools must still be diligent to ensure they only release information that is relevant to the investigation.

Understanding FERPA's guidelines is important for educators, school administrators, and staff when working with authorities. Misunderstanding or misapplying FERPA can hinder efforts to locate a missing child or lead to unnecessary delays, which is why proper training on FERPA and its emergency exceptions should be a priority for all school personnel and law enforcement.

Further, it is important that schools have clear policies and procedures in place for handling missing or abducted child situations. These policies ensure that staff are prepared to act quickly, maintain compliance with FERPA, and communicate effectively with law enforcement and the child's family. In California, school policies on missing children should be aligned with the Education Code. For example, California Education Code Section 49068.6 requires school officials to inform law enforcement when a student has an unexplained absence for more than 10 days. This regulation emphasizes the importance of timely reporting and close communication with authorities, ensuring that a potential abduction or missing child case is not overlooked.

In addition to being knowledgeable about FERPA and Education Codes, school districts should consider the following when creating a comprehensive district/school policy regarding missing children:

- **FERPA Compliance:** Clearly outline how and when student records can be shared in emergencies.
- **Staff Training:** Ensure all staff members are trained in FERPA, California Education Code requirements, and emergency response protocols.
- **Reporting Procedures:** Establish a clear protocol for immediately notifying local law enforcement when a child is reported missing.
- **Communication Plan:** Develop a plan for coordinating communication between school staff, law enforcement, and the family of the missing child.
- **Regular Review and Updates:** Policies should be reviewed annually to ensure they remain up-to-date with any changes in federal or state regulations.

By developing clear policies and ensuring that all school personnel are aware of FERPA and relevant state laws, schools can play a vital role in the safe and timely recovery of missing or abducted children.

California Child Abduction Task Force Members

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