

Project Harmony Provides Tips for Walking Safely to School

Omaha, Neb. – As your little one gets ready to leave the house for school, you run through your checklist:

- Teeth brushed – check
- Backpack – check
- Gym shoes - check
- Lunch box – check
- Jacket – check

How about safety reminders? Is that on your checklist? If not, it should be.

In response to the recent reports of a stranger approaching students on the way to school, Project Harmony would like to remind parents to talk with their children about safety to and from school – most importantly – “stranger danger”.

Here are a few tips to share with your child to ensure their safety as they walk to school.

- Stay with a group. Always walk with at least one friend, two or three is even better.
- Stick to the route discussed with your parents (Safe Walking Plan). Never use shortcuts through empty parks, alleys, fields, etc. Avoid empty buildings and isolated areas.
- Don't wear headphones. Always be aware of your surroundings.
- If a stranger offers you a ride, say “NO!” and stay far away from their car.
- If someone is following you on foot or in a car, go to a place where there are other people – to a neighbor's home or into a store, for instance – and ask for help.
- Never leave school with a stranger, or anyone for that matter without parent consent.
- Noise is the best defense – yell, scream, shout, scatter books and belongings if forced into a car.
- Move away from any car that pulls up to the bus stop.
- Tell a trusted adult if a stranger is hanging around the school or playground.
- Never accept things from a stranger.
- If a stranger asks you a question, don't talk to them. Run away.

Another helpful suggestion is to share a code word with your child known only among family members. It is important to stress anyone offering a ride unexpectedly – even a family friend – will have been given the code word in advance.

“It is our mission to protect and support children,” says Project Harmony Executive Director Gene Klein. “The frequency for this short amount of time is concerning and as parents we need to be vigilant on educating our children about safety with regards to being approached by strangers.”

About Project Harmony

Project Harmony is a nonprofit, community-based organization that has served more than 25,000 children during the past 19 years by providing a child friendly environment in which specially-trained professionals work together to assess, investigate, and resolve child abuse

cases. In one centralized location, Project Harmony co-houses with Omaha Police Department Child Victim/Sexual Assault Unit and Nebraska Health & Human Services/Child Protection Service Initial Assessment and Child Abuse Hotline. Project Harmony exists to protect and support children, collaborate with professionals and engage the community to end child abuse and neglect.

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