
Do You Know How to Be Street Smart?

Do you know how to be **street smart**? Being street smart means knowing how to keep yourself safe from strangers when you're alone or with other kids. Whether you're walking to school or to the bus, hanging out on the playground, or riding your bike in your neighborhood, being street smart helps you stay **safe**. When you're street smart, you know your way around, you know how handle yourself in tough situations, and you're able to "read" people.

Imagine if a baby were able to walk around alone. The baby couldn't understand a "Don't Walk" sign, wouldn't know where to go for help, and couldn't find the way back home. What's more, the baby might not know good people from bad people. The baby would be in danger.

Thank goodness you're not a baby anymore! You know your way around and you know the rules of the road. The most complicated thing to learn is how to deal with **strangers**. But if you follow a few rules **all the time** and trust your instincts, you can be really street smart.

Who Are Strangers?

When you're walking home from school, a person in a car pulls up and asks you for directions. At the park, someone says he needs you to help look for his lost puppy. These people may seem friendly, but no matter what they say to you, they have one thing in common: They're strangers.

Most strangers aren't dangerous and wouldn't do anything to hurt kids. Unfortunately, though, some strangers can be dangerous, and it's impossible to tell who's OK and who's not. A dangerous person doesn't necessarily look scary or mean — the person might look nice.

That's why it's important to follow these safety rules all the time:

Make Your Whereabouts Known

The adult who's taking care of you needs to know where you are at all times. That means telling your mom or dad, grandmother, babysitter, or whoever is keeping an eye on you where you are and when you'll be coming home.

Stick With a Friend

It's more fun and safer to do things with friends. Take along a buddy when you walk to school, bike around the park, or go to the store. Traveling with a friend whenever you can is a good idea, and traveling with a bunch of kids is even better.

Pick Out Safe Spots

What are **safe spots**? Safe spots are places where you can stop if you need help, like the houses of kids you know, your parents' friends' houses, stores, restaurants, police stations, libraries, and fire departments. When you're walking or riding your bike, make a mental note of the safe spots along your route. That way, you'll know where they are in case you ever need one.

Avoid Places That Aren't Safe

Be sure to keep away from isolated areas. These are places where no one is around, like the woods or small, dark streets.

Let Grown-Ups (and Only Grown-Ups) Help Strangers

It's nice to help people. But remember: **Strangers should ask adults, not kids, for help.**

If a stranger approaches you and asks you for help — such as with giving directions, finding lost money, or searching for a runaway dog — don't help. Don't even give an answer. Right away, you should walk the other way. If you're not near a safe spot, try any store or restaurant. If you feel you're in danger, yell for help.

Stay Away From Strangers' Cars

If a stranger pulls up in a car and offers you a ride, don't get in. You probably know that rule, right? But that's not all of it. It's also important to avoid a stranger's car completely. If a stranger asks you to look in the car, don't do it. Don't agree to look in the trunk or in the back of a truck or van. Don't put your arm in the window to take something or point to something. Don't agree to come closer to see a pet or to get a toy that's offered.

If a stranger offers you a toy, some candy, a stuffed animal, or anything else, don't ever take it. Even if it's something you **really** want, if the offer is coming from a stranger, you should ignore the person and walk the other way.

If a stranger walks up or pulls up in a car and you're too far away to hear the person, don't go closer, even if the person waves you over. Just get away. Run the opposite way that the car is heading. Get to an adult you know, a police officer, a security guard, or one of your safe spots as fast as you can if the stranger comes toward you.

What if a stranger comes to pick you up from school, sports, dancing lessons, or the park? This is no different from any other time — a stranger is a stranger, so don't get in the car. Even if the stranger says that your parents sent him or her, or that there's an emergency and you must get in the car and go to the hospital, turn right around and tell an adult what happened. Your parents would have told you if someone else was coming to pick you up, and if an emergency really did occur, they would send someone you already know, not a stranger.

Even if the stranger knows your name, don't be fooled. There are lots of ways to find out kids' names, even when someone doesn't know them or their families. For example, do you have a jacket or a piece of jewelry that has your name on it? That's an easy way for someone to learn your name.

Make a Lot of Noise If You're Scared

You've probably been told lots of times that you should not yell. You should keep it down, be calm, or use your inside voice. When you think you might be in danger, forget all of that advice! That's the **perfect** time to be noisy!

If a stranger approaches you (on foot or in a car) and follows you when you try to walk away, yell for help as you run away. If a stranger ever tries to grab you, yell as loudly as you can and try to get away. You can shout things like, "Help! I don't know you!" or "Help! This isn't my dad!" People in the area will hear what's going on and help you, so make plenty of noise.

Trust Your Instincts

Kids need to follow the rules of street smarts **all the time with every stranger**, even if the situation seems fine. And if your instinct is telling you something is dangerous or just not quite right, get out of the area, tell an adult, or call 911. No one will think that you are silly. In fact, just the opposite — people will think that you're truly street smart!

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Date reviewed: September 2013

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