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# Conversations with children about boundaries to stay safe starts at earliest age possible, advocates say

'The last thing you want to do is have any regret,' says chief operating officer of Child Safe

**Patty Santos**, Reporter

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**SAN ANTONIO** – Child advocates say parents should start candid conversations with children at an early age to help teach them about appropriate boundaries and protect them from danger.

If parents have the feeling that they want to start to have a conversation with their kids, then it's the appropriate time, says Randy McGibeny, chief operating officer of Child Safe, a trauma-focused center for child victims and child survivors of abuse and neglect.

"The last thing you want to do is have any regret about not having a side conversation. And then, God forbid, something happens to one of your children that you felt like you could have said something or done something that would have prevented that from happening," McGibeny said.

McGibeny said child abductions are extremely rare, but in light of the recent unexplained disappearance of a 3-year-old Lina Khil in San Antonio, it's important to remind parents to open up to kids about all dangers.

OFERTAS ATRACTIVAS DISPONIBLES AHORA.



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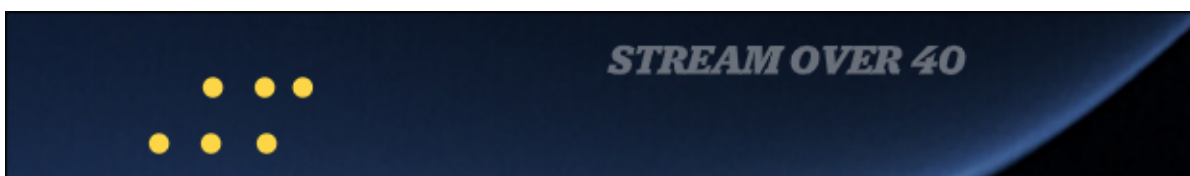


*Web Extra: Child Safe COO discusses how to speak with your children about boundaries to stay safe starts*

Use age-appropriate language and don't sugarcoat things. Be honest and use appropriate words for body parts. Doing this can empower children to speak up if and when there's danger. Children as young as 3 years old or 4 years old can begin to have an awareness and understanding if a parent explains things at their level.

"The appropriate time to me is the earliest, the better that you can have that conversation. The biggest takeaway for me is that if we don't have conversations about boundaries and safety of our bodies, specifically our bodies with our children, then we're doing a disservice to our children," McGibeny said. "That conversation goes a long way, not just for abductions and physical abuse and sexual abuse, but it starts to teach them about appropriate boundaries for themselves, even as they get older and move into adult relationships."

Dr. Mandie Tibball Svatek, a University Health pediatrician, said parents often ask her about the best approach to talk to children. Many are afraid to scare their children with a conversation about dangerous situations.



"Children oftentimes do have that 'trust your gut' sense, and if they feel that something isn't right, then they need to get away from that situation, and they need to reach out and seek help," Svatek said.,



*Web Extra: Pediatrician discusses how to role-play with children to keep them safe in dangerous situations*

The pediatrician suggests parents role-play different scenarios with their children and offer them possible plans to get to safety or seek help. Seek help from other parents, neighbors and teachers on approaching conversations you want to have with your child.

"Then, being upfront, letting them know what's going on in the community, what has recently happened," Svatek said.

**Safely Ever After Inc.**, a child safety education website, offers several tips to parents.

**Healthychildren.org** highlights tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics.



The **National Crime Prevention Council** offers ways to teach kids about strangers.

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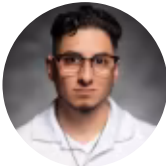
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Patty Santos joined the KSAT 12 News team in July 2017. She has a proven track record of reporting on hard-hitting news that affects the community.

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Adam Barraza is a photojournalist at KSAT 12 and an El Paso native. He interned at KVIA, the local ABC affiliate, while still in high school. He then moved to San Antonio and, after earning a degree from San Antonio College and the University of the Incarnate Word, started working in news. He’s also a diehard Dodgers fan and an avid sneakerhead.

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