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TEACHING STRANGER DANGER AWARENESS TO CHILDREN ON THE SPECTRUM

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As a parent, one of the biggest fears you may have is not being there for your child if they are presented with a dangerous situation. Reality is parents cannot be with their children all day long to protect them but what they can do is teach their children the skills they need in order to stay safe when you are not around.

So, how do you teach safety awareness to your child? First, have your child identify familiar adults vs unfamiliar adults. It is important to make sure your child can discriminate between the two groups. If your child identifies the individual presented in the photo correctly, provide verbal descriptive praise. If they answer incorrectly, provide corrective feedback. Once your child is able to identify both groups, teach them to comply with instructions given by familiar adults, not by strangers. For instance, most strangers will use candies, dogs or simply ask the child to approach them either verbally or with a gesture. Role playing is an excellent way to practice what to do if they are approached by a stranger. If your child is verbal, have them say, "no" assertively and run to a safe place where they can tell a known adult what just happened. If your child is non-verbal, have them nod their head "no" and run to a safe place with trusted adults immediately. Use praise, or positive reinforcement, if they answer correctly and corrective feedback if they answer incorrectly. When practicing using in-situ training it is important to do so in multiple settings to ensure generalization of the skill. Social stories are also a great way to teach stranger danger awareness. Dating back to the 1900s they have been used to help children on the spectrum acquire life-skills.



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