

## ICS Safeguarding Newsletter 10

# Safety Matters: At home, at school, online

### When Parents Travel: Why School Needs to Know

In an international community it's very common for parents to travel for work or family commitments. Children are often wonderfully adaptable, but long periods without parents at home can affect their emotions, behaviour and sense of security – even if they are left with loving relatives or trusted carers.

From a safeguarding point of view, it is essential that school knows when both parents are out of the country, especially for more than a few days. There are two main reasons for this:

#### 1. Supporting your child's wellbeing

Children might show their feelings in many different ways: becoming quieter or more withdrawn, suddenly more tearful, or more 'challenging' in class. If we know that a parent is away, we can understand these changes, keep a closer eye on them and offer extra nurture and reassurance. Staff can be more sensitive about topics that might touch a nerve (stories about families, special events, etc.), and our counselling/wellbeing staff can check in where needed.

#### 2. Knowing who is responsible in an emergency

If a child is unwell, injured, or there is any urgent safeguarding or medical concern, we must be able to reach a responsible adult straight away. When parents are abroad, normal contact numbers may not work, or time zones can make communication slower. It really helps if we have:

- The dates when parents will be away
- The name and contact details of the adult(s) caring for the child
- Clear written permission about who can make decisions for the child (e.g. medical treatment, collection from school)

This information will be treated sensitively and only shared with staff who need to know in order to care for your child.

If you have any planned travel coming up where both parents will be away, please let the school know in advance. A quick email or WhatsApp can make a big difference to how well we can keep your child safe, calm and supported while you are away.

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## Stranger Safety in the Community: Practical Tips for Families

The idea of ‘stranger danger’ can feel frightening for both children and adults. Our aim is not to scare children, but to equip them with simple, memorable safety habits when they are out and about – whether walking to and from school, at the park, in a mall, or at social events. Here are some key messages you can reinforce at home:

### Use “tricky people”, not “strangers”

Completely avoiding all strangers isn’t realistic – children meet new adults in shops, at school events and in the community. Instead, we can talk about “tricky people”: anyone (known or unknown) who makes them feel uncomfortable or who asks them to break safety rules.

Simple rules for children (in age-appropriate language)

- Check first – Before going anywhere with someone, taking something from them, or changing plans, they should always check with the trusted adult looking after them.
- Don’t go alone – Encourage children to stay with friends or siblings and stick to agreed routes and meeting points.
- No secrets about safety – If an adult asks them to keep a secret that makes them feel uneasy, that is a sign to tell a trusted grown-up.
- Make a fuss if you feel unsafe – It’s okay to say “No!”, shout, move away and go to a safer place (a shop, security staff, a group of families) if someone is making them feel worried.

### Practical steps for parents

- Agree clear rules about where your child can go and who they can go with.
- Practise what they would do if they got lost or felt unsafe (who they would talk to, where they would go).
- Help them memorise essential information: their name, school name, and at least one contact number, where age-appropriate.
- Keep communication open – let children know they won’t get in trouble for telling you about a situation that felt wrong.

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At school we reinforce these messages in a calm and reassuring way, emphasising that most adults are kind – but that it's always wise to have a safety plan.

## 3. When Online 'Friends' Aren't Really Friends

Many children now meet people online through games, social media, and chat functions. For younger children, this might mean simple gaming chats; for older ones, it can include messaging apps or social platforms. While online spaces can be fun, there is also the risk of adults pretending to be children or people with unsafe intentions.

We don't want to make children fearful of the internet, but we do want them to be smart and cautious about who they talk to.

### Key messages for children

- You can adapt the language depending on age, but the core ideas are:
- People online are not always who they say they are. A "12-year-old gamer" might actually be an adult.
- Never share personal details – no real name, school name, address, phone number, daily routine, or pictures that show where you live or go to school.
- No private chats with people you don't know in real life.
- Never agree to meet someone you only know online. If anyone suggests a meeting or asks to move to a private chat, that is a big warning sign.

If something feels wrong, stop, screenshot, tell. Stop the conversation, take a screenshot if possible, and show a trusted adult.

### What parents can do

- Keep devices in family spaces where possible, especially for younger children.
- Use parental controls and privacy settings on games and apps, and check friend lists regularly.
- Talk regularly (and calmly) about what they do online. Show curiosity rather than judgement so they feel able to tell you if something worries them.
- Make a family rule that if someone online makes them feel uncomfortable, scared, or confused, they must tell you or another trusted adult straight away.

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At school, we teach children that their safety and wellbeing are more important than any game, score, or chat. If you have concerns about a particular app or game your child is using, please contact us – we are always happy to offer guidance.

## 4. Creating a Family Safety Plan – Online and Offline

One of the best ways to help children feel safe is to plan ahead. When children know what to do and who to turn to, they are more confident and less anxious – and they are more likely to make safer choices in a difficult situation.

Here are some ideas for building a simple family safety plan:

### 1. Agree your “trusted adults” list

Together with your child, make a short list of adults they can talk to if they ever feel worried, scared, or unsure – at home, at school, and in the wider family/community. You might write these on a small card for older children or draw pictures for younger ones.

### 2. Practise “What if...?”

Use calm, short conversations – perhaps in the car or at dinner – to practise scenarios:

- “What would you do if you got lost in a mall?”
- “What would you do if someone online asked for your photo?”
- “What would you do if a grown-up asked you to keep a secret that made you feel funny inside?”

Praise their ideas and gently guide them towards safe responses: go to a safe place, find a trusted adult, call a parent, say “no”, and tell someone.

### 3. Teach the ‘uh-oh’ feeling

Help children notice their “early warning signs”: a tight tummy, feeling shaky, wanting to cry, feeling like something is “not quite right.” Explain that this is their body’s way of warning them. If they feel that way, they should move away from the situation and tell an adult, whether the problem is online or in real life.

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### **4. Share your plan with school where helpful**

If your child is particularly anxious, or there are changes at home (such as parents travelling), let us know. We can reinforce the same messages in school and keep a closer eye on them.

Together, home and school can give children a strong, consistent message: you are important, your feelings matter, and there are always adults ready to listen and help.