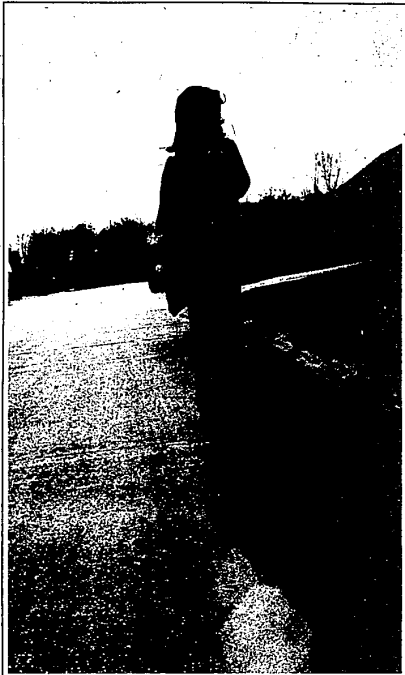


It's 1981! Do you know where your children are?



Pat Bordman

I have recently received several inquiries concerning a topic of concern to us all. The following is typical.
 "During the winter months I didn't worry much about my children's safety. But now that warm weather is here, they take off on their bikes or run and play all over the neighborhood. I think of the Oakland County child killer and the Atlanta slayer and I'm scared something might happen to them. How can I warn them about the dangers outside without scaring them too?"
 M.B., Livonia.

AND FROM A nursery school director: "Recently we showed the film 'Don't Talk with Strangers.' How do we teach children to be friendly in a world where they must be leery of strangers?"
 R.G., Southfield.

ONE OF THE saddest aspects of contemporary life is that violence is now anticipated and expected. We are learning to live with both the fears caused by those who would do us harm, and the restrictions this places on our movements.

Unfortunately, the dangers are not as easy to point out to children as those of fire or crossing a busy street. In every neighborhood and within every community lurk shoplifters, peeping Toms and those who would harm little children — right alongside loving and caring individuals. You can't tell who is who just by looking. So trust in those unknown to us ignores the facts.

Children must be helped to formulate tactics so that they can react without panic if trouble comes their way. A child cannot always depend on having an adult nearby.

Children should know that they are never to take rides. They should not even approach unfamiliar cars or people. They are never to take money, candy or any other items from others.

They should try to play where there are other children playing, tell a parent where they will be and walk directly home from school following the same route each day. If they are ever approached, they should run away to a neighbor or store owner.

By having specific instructions the child is relieved of vague and worrisome imaginings.

CHILDREN CAN BE helped to have a cheerful and happy disposition, but let us not confuse this with a blindly trusting heart. Belief in our fellowman is not a given, it must be earned. We must teach caution and gentle suspicion, not to the exclusion of friendliness and laughter but with it.
 Random interchanges with total strangers can be discouraged. But acts of loving kindness — like taking a cake to a new neighbor, bringing flowers to someone sick, or even holding a door open in the market — demonstrate true friendliness and can be encouraged.

Patricia Bordman, a free-lance writer and photographer, has a master's degree in early childhood education. She has taught elementary school and conducted workshops and lectures.

Mrs. Bordman welcomes suggestions and comments. Please write her c/o the Observer & Eccentric Newspaper, 36251 Schoolcraft Rd., Livonia 48150.
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