

## **Safety: It Takes Planning and Education** *For Children and Young Adults with Disabilities*

They are the things that happen every day. Maybe a stranger knocks at the door, or perhaps the bus doesn't come on time. Maybe a telephone solicitor requests personal information.

As children with disabilities become youth and adults in the community, it is vital that they have the skills and resources to stay safe. You can help your child prepare for this aspect of independence in many ways.

Would your young adult with a disability know how to handle such situations? Knowing how to respond when things go wrong, feel scary, or may be dangerous is important to being safe.

What skills or resources would you want in place for your child before it happens?

You might want to start discussing these issues with your child. Your child's disability, skills, and living situation will all be factors to consider as you have this conversation. If your child is receiving transition planning services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP), you may also want to talk with the IEP team about including safety goals.

Consider the following six areas when thinking about safety for your transition-age young adult.

### **Self-advocacy skills**

Help your child develop healthy boundaries and effective communication skills. You may want to encourage your child to practice communicating messages such as:

"No," "Leave me alone," "I need" or "I want"

### **Disability-appropriate supports**

People with a communication or behavior disability may find it helpful to carry a card that could be used to communicate with others, including the police. The card

might contain information such as your:

- Your child's name
- A sentence stating the disability and how it might affect your child's ability to handle situations
- A phone number of someone who could be contacted if necessary

### **Safety network**

Help your child identify safe people and places in the community. This list might include:

- Neighbors
- Community helpers, such as firefighters, police officers, security guards, doctors, or nurses
- Public places, such as a fire station, police station, place of worship, hospital, or clinic

### **Resources**

You never know when or where a problem might arise. Make sure your child always has a way to reach someone who can help. Provide a cell phone and emergency phone numbers for your child to carry at all times.

### **Transportation**

Help your child learn to "expect the unexpected" and know what to do. For example:

- Explain that if someone on the bus makes your child feel uncomfortable, your child could move closer to the driver.
- Discuss what your child should do if the bus goes on a detour or breaks down. This response might include calling you or another trusted adult.

### **Common sense**

Common sense safety tips are good for everyone, with or



without disabilities. Have your whole family review the list.

### **At home**

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- Keep doors locked at all times.
- When you leave, lock your windows.
- Don't open your door to strangers or let them into your building, apartment, or house.
- Have a working fire extinguisher and know how to use it.

### **Out and About**

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- Don't leave a purse in the grocery basket when you turn away.
- Don't give personal information to strangers.
- Stay alert to what is going on around you.

It's a big world out there, but with some discussion and planning, your child can be safe.