

[X Home](#)

Protecting God's Children For Parents

Summer Safety Tips for Parents

By VIRTUS

As you begin to plan for the summer—from your own backyard, to the local park, to summer camps and other overnight or out-of-town child and youth activities—you also need to keep child safety in mind. Here are some things to consider:

Playing Outdoors

When the parents of today were children, our mothers always wanted us to play outside. We would join with other kids and roam around the neighborhood until it was time to eat. We had a limited area we could explore and we had to check in with mom at lunchtime and dinnertime. That was years ago. In today's world, there are some additional precautions you should consider:

Reinforce the safe-adult, safe-kid, and safe-touching rules. Let your child know that they should *never* go anywhere alone with a stranger, even if the stranger asks them to nicely or seems to need their help. Your children should always talk to you first before going *anywhere* with *anyone*.

Children do, in fact, offend against other children. This issue is not unique to a particular season. However, children may have more opportunities to be out of your immediate sight during the summer. For this reason, it's important to periodically remind your child that another child or adult—even a child or adult they know and trust, may:

- Want to see or touch their private parts,
- Try to touch their private parts, or
- Want to show them *their* (the adult's) private parts.

Tell your child that if one of these situations occurs, your child should say: "Stop it!" and should immediately tell you what happened. Granted, kids are kids and are curious about their bodies, but it is better to be safe than sorry.

Make sure your child knows where he or she may and may not go, has a watch, can tell time, and knows when to check in with you. Younger children should check in more frequently than older children.

If you can afford it, purchase a cell phone or a walkie-talkie set for your child so he or she can reach you in an emergency or vice-versa. However, if you do this, remember to keep your phone or walkie-talkie turned on and accessible to you.

Summer Camps

There are many types of camps to entertain, teach, and take care of your child. Unfortunately, offenders can be drawn to camps *because* children are present, rules are loose and offenders could often have unmonitored access to children. As a parent or guardian you should create a simple checklist to make sure that the camp is



safe. For example:

- **Does the camp conduct criminal background checks, reference checks, or employ other screening methods** for its counselors, other employees, volunteers, and contractors who have unmonitored access to the camp or campers? It is important that the camp take background screening seriously.
- **Does the camp, at a minimum, adhere to an “open access” policy and, preferably, a “two deep” philosophy?** “Open access” is a policy that demands that no child be taken by an adult to a location where other adults do not have easy access to enter without announcing their presence. A “two deep” policy—the one used often by the Boy Scouts of America—requires that two adults are always present with each in sight of the other. The point of both policies is to keep a child from being taken to a private location where a sexual act can take place.
- **Does the camp have a proper ratio of adults to children?** Often to save money, camps will use minors to watch younger children. This is not a problem so long as these supervising minors have adults present to help them through difficult situations and to watch their interaction with children at all times.
- **Do “overnight” camps have two adults present in each sleeping location?** Many offenses are committed against children while they sleep. There should be two adults present in each location where children are sleeping. This allows the adults to monitor each other and helps prevent abuse from occurring.
- **Does the camp allow your child to call home?** Many camps want to cut the communication lines between parent and child so that the child gains independence. This has value, but, if a child is being offended against, it also keeps the child from calling the adults he or she needs in a time of crisis. You should let your child know and insist that the camp to agree to a simple rule: If your child says something is an emergency, then the camp *must* allow your child to call you—no questions asked. Before your child leaves for camp, sit down with him or her and go over the safe touching rules and let your child know that he or she can call you in case of an emergency.
- **Have the camp counselors, employees, and volunteers received any form of training on the prevention of child sexual abuse?** Training, of course, will make employees and volunteers cognizant of what to look for in order to prevent abuse, but it also demonstrates that a camp takes the prevention of child sexual abuse seriously.
- **Does the camp have a solid plan for protecting children from intruders?** Location and physical structures play a vital role in this issue, but parents should also ask specific questions to verify that the camp is serious about protecting children:
- **Does the camp have perimeter security (e.g., fences, gates, locking doors on cabins, well-illuminated walkways to restrooms, cabins and other common areas, etc.)?** Perimeter security may not prevent a seasoned and determined intruder from entering a camp, but it can present enough of a deterrent to cause most potential intruders to move on to an easier target.
- **Does the camp have a policy for how to enforce perimeter security (e.g., gates close and lock at a certain time, all visitors are required to enter at a particular location and check in for identification and credentialing, regular security patrols at night to minimize the opportunity for intruders to circumvent the established visitors’ protocol, etc.)?**
- **Does the camp have an emergency response policy for responding to intruders and other security issues?**

Summer fun brings with it wonderful memories as well as a range of issues that affect your ability to protect your children from sexual abuse. The core best practice rule for child safety is to have as much information as possible and replace blind trust with knowledge and healthy suspicion. That means asking questions:

- Where are you going?
- What will you do while you are there?
- Who will be with you?
- When will you return?

- Which adults will be present?

Then evaluate the situation and determine if it is safe for your child to participate. Don't be afraid to say "No."
When you and your children *think* safety, summer is filled with fun opportunities for children to enjoy .