

Back-To-School Safety Tips

A Little Common Sense Goes A Long Way

By Ellen Crean



(AP / CBS)

(CBS) As summer draws to a close, parents need to spend some time thinking about back-to-school safety issues.

Bob Stuber is the founder of Escape School, a group that aims to keep kids safe. He has some common-sense, no-nonsense suggestions for making the school year a safe one, and he shared some of them on *The Early Show*.

Stuber founded the Escape School in 1997. Escape School is an all-inclusive forum on child safety and he has trained over 80 other individuals to serve as Escape School instructors throughout the U.S. and Canada. The forum deals with everything from abduction to water safety. In all situations, he promotes the reawakening of common sense.

TRAVEL TO/FROM SCHOOL

There is no "right" age for kids to start walking or biking to school alone or with a friend. Each family needs to consider the maturity of their child, how many busy streets have to be crossed, if these streets have lights or crossing guards.

Here are Stuber's top safety suggestions for parents:

1. **Research Route to School:** Parents and kids together need to map out what route to take to school, and any alternate routes. In addition to feeling comfortable with the busy streets, etc., it's very important that parents know who lives along the child's path. Megan's Law requires that any person jailed for a sexual offense and then released be "registered" in the neighborhood where they live. This is public record and parents should utilize it by visiting

the police station and researching the route to school.

2. **Encourage Responsibility:** Yes, adults in cars should always be on the lookout for kids in the street, especially in a school zone, but we all know this often doesn't happen. Kids should not expect cars to look out for them; they need to take responsibility and protect themselves. Don't allow your child to walk to school wearing headphones or playing a Gameboy because this will make him oblivious to his surroundings.
3. **Watch Child Reach Safety:** If you drive your child to school, don't take off the moment she steps out of the car. Make sure she gets inside, or at least to the front lawn/sidewalk where she's with other students and teachers. Don't feel pressure to pull away just because cars are piling up behind you - this is important. Many kids disappear between Mom's car and the school. Also, the congestion of many cars and buses can be dangerous.
4. **Advocate for Safety Changes:** Parents often don't realize how much power they have to change things within a school. If you think your child's bus should have a crossing gate, or your school needs a call-back system (the administration calls if your child does not arrive at school), then gather other parents together and complain. Don't wait for these changes to be instituted as the result of a tragedy. Stuber says administrations are very open to listening and responding to parents. They don't want to be blamed for an accident, and they know that they're funded by the parents' tax dollars.

HOME ALONE

Another big safety concern for parents is how to protect "latchkey" kids who are home alone after school. This area especially, Stuber says, is one in which experts love to offer advice. The favorite rule uttered by parents and experts alike is: Don't let a stranger inside the house. It's a good rule, but ineffective.

"Stranger is a terrible word," Stuber explains. "Kids expect strangers to be scary, and they're not."

As part of his work with Escape School, Stuber has met with parents who swear their children would never let a stranger inside. Wearing a hidden camera, he then knocks on a door while parents watch from a van down the street. He tells the child his cat has run into the backyard and asks to come in to retrieve the cat. The lie works EVERY TIME.

There are really only two rules parents need to give their latchkey kid:

1. **Keep Doors Shut:** Instead of telling kids not to let a stranger in, the real rule needs to be: Keep the door shut and locked at all times. Don't fill your child's head with "don'ts"; simply tell them to keep all doors closed. If someone comes to the door, your child can communicate with this person through the door.
2. **Set Check-In Time:** Another thing parents should ask their child to do is call and let Mom or Dad know that she is home safe. Set a consistent time for the child to call each day. Give her 10 minutes plus or minus to allow for a slow bus, etc ... then start to worry if she doesn't meet this deadline. Also, find a close neighbor who is usually home around this time. If the parent can't be reached, the child knows to call this person.

Parents need to remember that kids who are home alone are much more likely to encounter dangers such as fire from burning popcorn or falling down the stairs than being abducted by a stranger. Parents need to consider some of these issues facing their families and deal with them accordingly.

DEALING WITH A BULLY

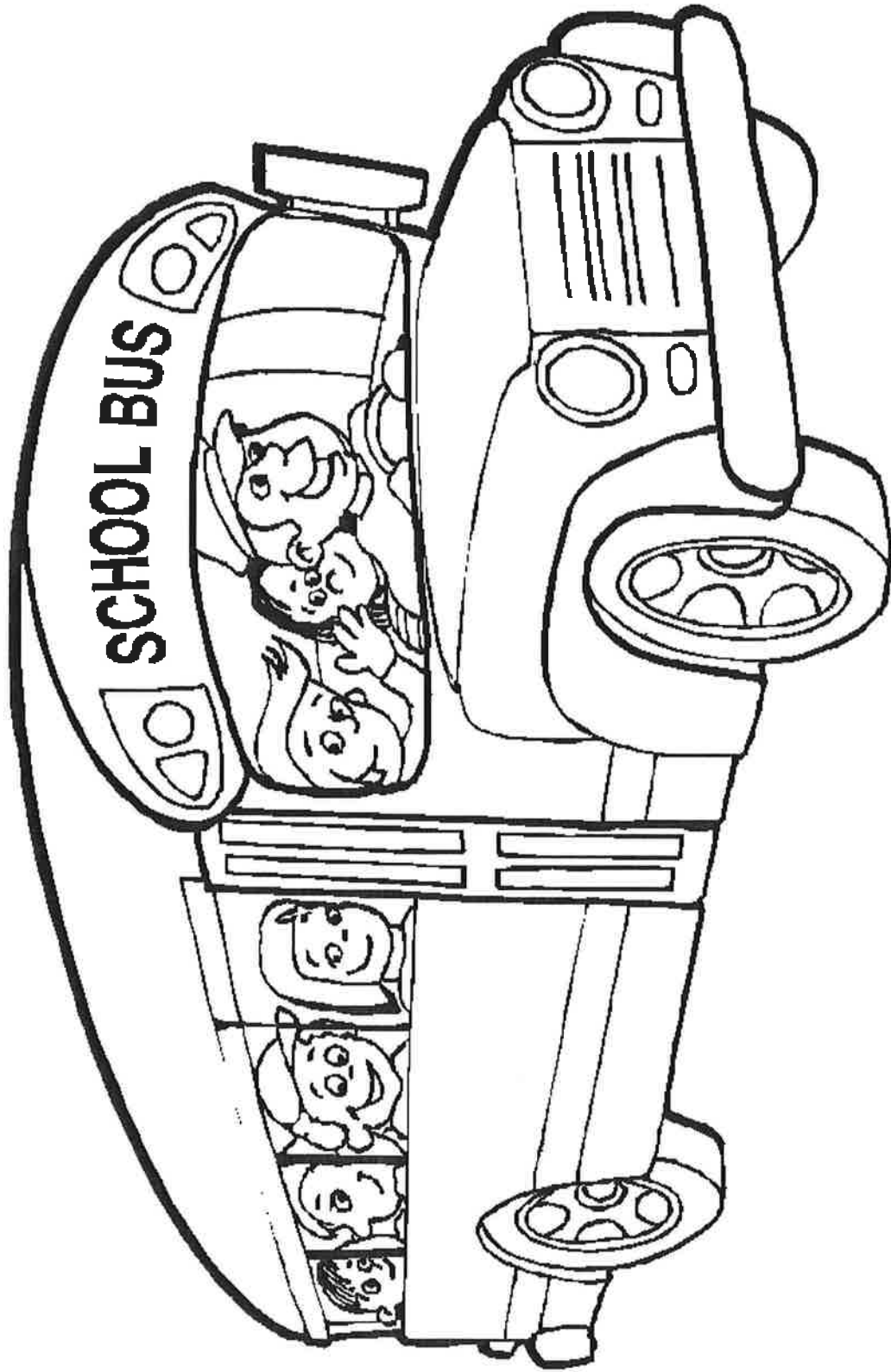
Sometimes, the idea of a bully seems more like a sitcom plot than a reality. However, bullies are one of the big things parents continue to worry about when sending their child to school.

"Bullies make the child feel terrible and make the whole family miserable," says Stuber. "This can't be a wait-and-see issue; parents need to be aggressive on this one."

Kids don't usually admit they are being abused at school. Parents must make it clear to kids how essential it is to share this information. When parents discover their child is the victim of a bully, Stuber has three steps for them to take.

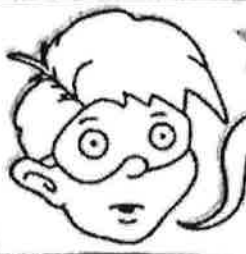
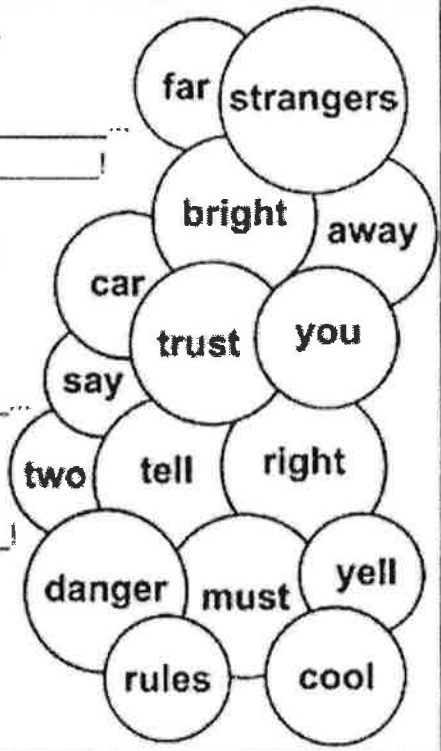
1. **Visit School in Person:** Talk to the principal or counselor. Explain the situation and give them a chance to deal with the problem. You **MUST** go in person to show the school how serious you are about the bullying and make sure you have the administrator's full attention.
2. **Request Meeting with Parents:** If the school doesn't stop the behavior, ask to meet at the school with the bully's parents. Make them aware of what's going on and ask them to deal with it immediately.

3. **Get Police Involved:** Finally, if you have seen no changes, go to the police. This step rarely has to be taken, but it can be effective if necessary. Going to the police doesn't mean you want to have the child arrested; think of the police as another mediator, one the bully's parents may be more likely to respond to. Sit down with the police, explain the steps you've taken to stop the bullying, and ask for advice. They may have information you didn't know before such as, this boy has been a problem in the past. You can then go back to the bully's parents, tell them you've spoken with the police and threaten to officially lodge a complaint if the bully's behavior doesn't stop.



DON'T LOSE YOUR COOL... REMEMBER THE RULES!

1. Stay away from _____
Don't talk to _____!
2. Remember the adults you _____
Check with them first you _____!
3. It's okay to _____
Then go run and _____!
4. It's safer with _____
Your buddy and _____!
5. There's nothing to _____
Just walk _____!
6. Walk where its _____
You'll get home all _____!
7. Don't get in the _____
Run fast and _____!
8. Don't lose your _____
Remember the _____!



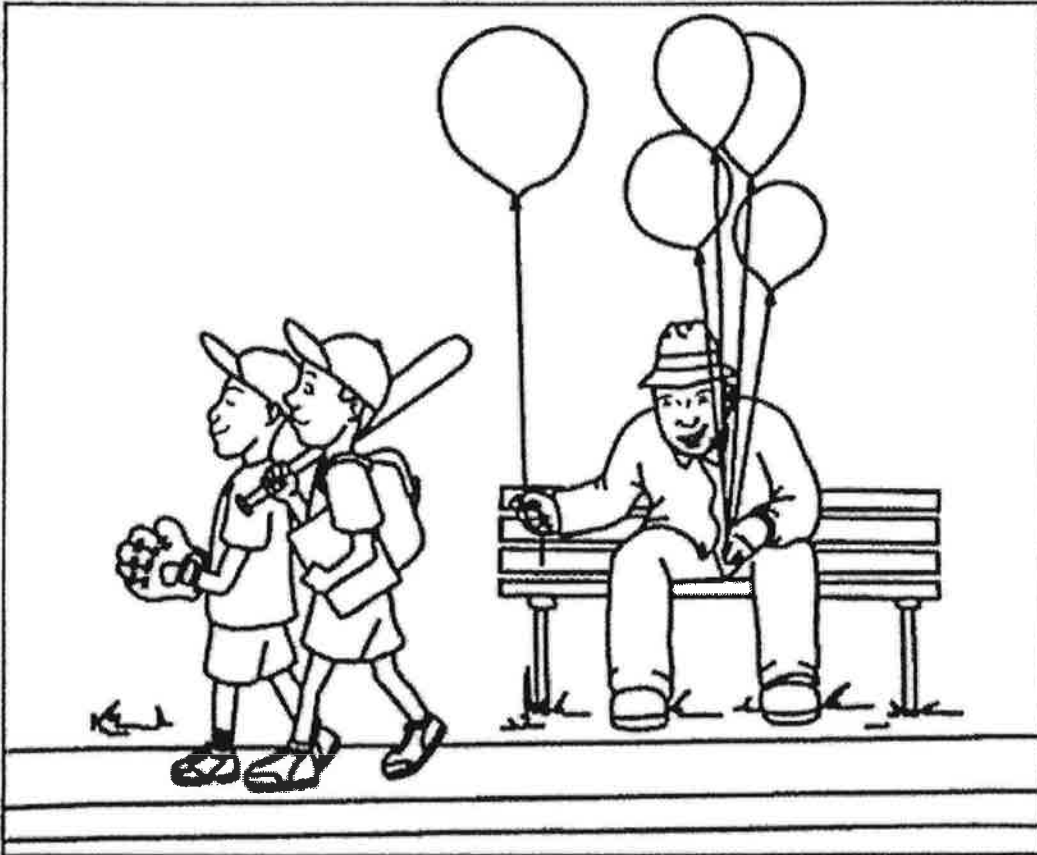
Being safe can be fun. Always practice being safe by following the rules. Use the words in the balls to help me fill in the blanks above to learn and remember the rules.

IT'S SAFER WITH TWO... YOUR BUDDY AND YOU!



When you're not with your parents, always travel with a "buddy." A buddy is someone you can be safer with in case you meet a stranger or if you are lost. Connect the dots above to give the child a buddy.

THERE'S NOTHING TO SAY...
JUST WALK AWAY!



Never talk to strangers. Strangers may offer you candy or gifts. Don't take anything from anyone without checking with your parents first. If a stranger tries to talk to you, don't answer... just walk away. Color the picture above of the two buddies above being safe.



IT'S OKAY TO YELL...
THEN GO RUN AND TELL!



If a stranger tries to touch you or take you with him or her, don't be afraid to yell out, "Leave me alone, you're a stranger!" Run away as fast as you can and tell a trusted adult, or run into the nearest store and get help. Color the picture above of the child running away from the stranger.

