

LEGAL ROUTES™

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MO SCHOOL DISTRICT ISSUES SAFETY TIPS AFTER ATTEMPTED ABDUCTION

The killing of Alabama school bus driver Chuck Poland, Jr. and abduction of five-year-old Ethan on January 29, 2013 came close on the heels of the horrific fatal shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. Poland gave his life to protect 20 children on the school bus. At Sandy Hook, teachers faced down gunman Adam Lanza in an attempt to protect innocent children. These awful tragedies and the heroic actions of key staff members must stir you to reflect on what you're prepared to do to protect your students. Even if you are never faced with these terrible incidents, you need to be constantly vigilant about the safety and security of students on your buses.

You need to be “heroes in advance” of a crisis.

Your student riders face danger even on the way to the bus stop. The Park Hill School District (the one in which I live) sent safety tips to parents after a frightening incident in mid-November. A 13-year-old girl was on her way to the school bus stop when a vigilant motorist stopped an attempted abduction. She saw a man walking briskly behind the apparently oblivious student, and took action. The motorist saw the man grab the girl's face with a gloved hand, and drag her backward into a small wooded area. The woman immediately yelled “Get out of here” to the man; he let the girl go, and ran into the woods. This Good Samaritan was a “hero in advance” of a tragedy in the making.

The email to parents included these tips:

- Role-play with your children how someone might approach them to offer candy, ask for help or ask if they'd like to meet a “new puppy.” Teach your children to say a firm “no” and walk away.
- Remind children that strangers look like normal people, not monsters.
- Tell children not to approach a motor vehicle if someone beckons them for directions. Tell them that adults do not need directions from children.
- Create a code word to use with your children so they will know when a message is from you.
- If someone follows your child, the child should scream loudly and run away. If someone tries to grab your child, the child should fall to the ground and kick and scream. The child should make as much noise as possible to attract attention.
- Tell your children to tell you if someone has asked them to keep a secret from you.
- Children have very good instincts. They should trust a feeling that tells them whether something is safe.

We hope and pray you will not be called upon to exhibit heroism in crises like those in Alabama or Connecticut. Look for opportunities to “heroes in advance” of a tragedy. One way you might do that is to consider safety tips you might share with parents and students about bus stop safety.

Please let us know about the steps you take in this regard so that *Legal Routes* may be a vehicle for sharing them with others.

“Your roadmap to pupil transportation law and compliance.”

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