

# Houston Police Department

## Back to School Safety



**Public Affairs  
Community Outreach Unit  
713-308-3200  
[www.houstonpolice.org](http://www.houstonpolice.org)**



# Back to School Safety for Kids

The Houston Police Department wants all children to be safe for the upcoming school year. However, Child Safety starts with the Parents/Guardians. We all must teach our children to be safe and to follow our lead in personal safety. Take the time to talk with your children about personal safety. **Do not assume your child knows what to do.** Read each Safety Tip to them. Review each safety tip and get feedback about their concerns and questions.

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## **Be SAFE! Personal Safety for Kids**

- Be alert and aware of people and their surroundings.
- Familiarize your child with your neighborhood.
- If your child is out, the following are the places, *safe havens*, your child can go for safety: police and fire stations, houses of neighbors you trust, stores, shops, business offices.
- Walk/play with other children and try not to be alone. There is always safety in numbers.
- Stay in well-lighted areas.
- Teach your child to report suspicious persons to you, teachers, police officers, or other responsible adults.
- If your child is approached or followed by a suspicious vehicle or person:
  - 1) Scream
  - 2) Run away in the opposite direction
  - 3) Run to a safe haven
  - 4) Call the police.
- Teach your child what to take notice of when they encounter a suspicious vehicle or person: Type and color of vehicle, license plate number, male/female, clothing description, and distinguishing marks.
- Never hitchhike.
- Talk to your child about their friends and get to know them.
- Let your child know that they can dial 9-1-1 from a public phone for free.
- Speak with your child/children about gun safety. If you have a gun in the home, make sure it has a gunlock on it or is locked in a safe. Teach your child that if they see a gun, they should never touch it. They should run away and tell an adult.
- For more information about Personal Safety for Kids, visit our website at [www.houstontx.gov/police/crime\\_prevention.htm](http://www.houstontx.gov/police/crime_prevention.htm)



## Walking to School

Young pedestrians face a wide variety of decisions while walking to and from school. If your child walks to/from school, please review the following safety tips and discuss them with your child.

- Plan a walking route to school or the bus stop. Choose the most direct way with the fewest street crossings and, if possible, with intersections that have crossing guards.
- Walk the route with your child beforehand. Tell him or her to stay away from parks, vacant lots, fields and other places where there aren't many people around.
- Teach your child to cross at designated crosswalks at intersections.
- Mind all traffic signals and/or the crossing guard -- never cross the street against a light, even if you don't see any traffic coming.
- Wear reflective material...it makes you more visible to street traffic.
- Be sure your child walks to and from school with a sibling, friend, or neighbor.

### **Child Predators/Strangers**

- Teach your child never to talk to strangers or accept rides or gifts from strangers. **Remember**, a stranger is anyone you or your children don't know well or don't trust.
- Teach your child that if a stranger tries to take them away, they should quickly get away and yell, "This person is trying to take me away," or "This person is not my father/mother/guardian."
- Teach your child that if a stranger tries to grab them, they must make a scene and make every effort to get away by kicking, punching, screaming, and resisting.
- Children should be taught to never leave school with anyone they do not know. They must always **CHECK FIRST** with you or another trusted adult. If anyone tells them there is an emergency and they want your child to go with them, your child must always **CHECK FIRST** with you or another trusted adult before doing anything.
- Make sure to teach your child to tell their teacher or another trusted adult if they notice a stranger hanging around the school.



## Safety around the School Bus

For many children, the “Back to School/School Bus” experience is a new one and they may not understand the safety rules. Even if this is not a new experience, children need to be constantly reminded on the school bus safety rules. Please review the following safety tips and help prepare your child for a safer journey.

- Make sure your child knows their bus number. This will reduce your child’s stress and avoid confusion on which bus to ride.
- Make sure your child knows their telephone number and address.
- Parents/Guardians should visit the bus stop with their children. Look around the area where your child will be waiting and report any safety concerns, questions or problems to the school district’s police department.
- Walk the route to and from the bus stop with your child, pointing out landmarks and safe places to go if they are being followed or bothered by a stranger. The safe places can be used if your child needs help.
- Make a map with your child showing acceptable routes to the bus stop using main roads. Avoid using short cuts or isolated areas. The map will be a good guide if your child ever needs help finding their way.
- Teach your child what to do if the bus does not arrive on time.
- Your child should stay with a group while waiting at the bus stop. If anyone bothers your child while at the bus stop, you should teach him or her to get away from that person and tell you or a school administrator.
- If an adult approaches your child for help or directions, remember to remind your child that adults should not ask children for help; they should ask another adult.
- Instruct your child that if anyone confuses, scares or makes them feel uncomfortable and this person offers them a ride, they should shout NO! Children should never hitchhike or accept a ride from anyone unless you have told them that it is OK to do so in each instance.
- Tell your child that if anyone follows them on foot to get away from him or her as quickly as possible. If anyone follows them in a vehicle they should turn around, go in the opposite direction, and try to quickly get to a spot where a trusted adult may help them. Advise them to be sure to tell you or another trusted adult what happened.



## Bike Safety

Many students ride their bicycles to school. Unfortunately, a majority of kids are not familiar with the rules of the road or the guidelines they should follow to keep safe. If a child is riding their bicycle to school or around their neighborhood, Parents/Guardians should review these guidelines and create a “safe route” for the child.

### ***When riding a bicycle.....***

1. You are considered a driver by law.
2. You are subject to the rules of traffic signs and signals just as motorists.
3. You should be alert to traffic signs and know what they mean.
4. You should know the rules of the road.
5. You should stay to the far right of the roadway or stay in bicycle paths.
6. You should have a high-flying flag on your bike so motorists can see you.



### **Bicycle Safety Tips**

- Instruct your child to always ***Take A Friend*** when walking or riding his or her bike to and from school. It is safer and more fun to be with your friends. Walk and ride in well-lit areas and never take shortcuts.
- Bike helmets should have a sticker that says it meets standards set by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Bike helmets should fit properly and the straps should always be fastened.
- Bike Maintenance
  - Make sure your seat, handlebars, and wheels fit tightly.
  - Check and oil the chain regularly.
  - Check the brakes to be sure that they are working and not sticking.
  - Check the tires for the right tire pressure.
- Wear bright colored clothes and place reflectors on your bike. This will help other people see you. Also, wear the right clothes and shoes that fit so that nothing gets caught in the bike chain.
- Avoid wearing headphones because the music can distract you and cause you to not notice potential hazards around you.
- To learn more about laws dealing with bicycle riding, please visit [www.biketexas.org](http://www.biketexas.org).



## CyberSafety/Internet Safety for Kids

The Internet is a valuable educational medium that can offer students a wealth of information and educational resources. Parents/Guardians should view the Internet in this capacity, but also be very aware of the danger of child predators who use the Internet to expose children to inappropriate subject matter. Please review the following safety tips with your children and share with them the benefits, as well as the dangers of the Internet.

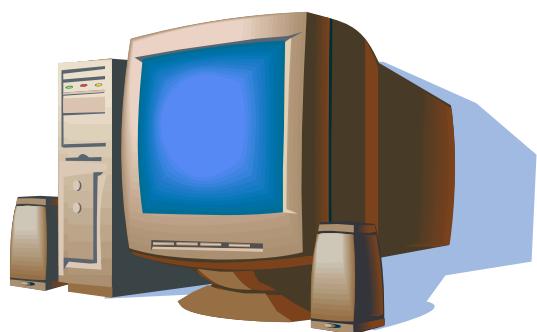
### **PARENTAL GUIDELINES**

- Place the computer in an area that is accessible by the whole family.
- Subscribe to an online service that offers parental control features.
- Purchase blocking software that utilizes passwords and parental controls.
- Spend time with your child exploring the Internet.
- Tell your child that he/she can confide in you without the fear of being punished.
- Talk openly with your child about your suspicions and about online dangers.
- Review all content on your child's computer including email, browser history, etc.
- Use caller ID services to monitor who is calling.
- Monitor your child's access to the Internet including email, chat rooms, instant messengers, etc.

### **INSTRUCT YOUR CHILD TO:**

- Always let you know immediately if they find something scary or threatening on the Internet.
- Never give out their name, address, telephone number, password, school name, parent's name, or any other personal information.
- Never meet face to face with someone they met online.
- Never respond to messages that have bad words or seem scary or weird.
- Never enter an area that charges for services without asking first.
- Never send your picture to anyone without your permission.

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## Home Alone

- Keep doors and windows locked at all times. Teach your child how to lock and unlock all doors and windows.
- Acknowledge all callers through a locked door.
- Never let anyone know you are alone.
- Answer all telephone calls and remember to not tell anyone you are home alone. Do tell the caller your parent is busy and will call back later.
- Post important telephone numbers near all phones in case of emergencies:
  - 9-1-1 for Police, Fire, Ambulance, And Poison Control.
  - Parent's/guardian's work and cellular phone numbers.
  - Neighbor's phone numbers.
- If a latch key child:
  - Check with parent/guardian or neighbor upon arrival at home.
  - Explain to the child the consequences of not making the call.
- Never display the house key around the home (keep the key concealed).
- No visitors are allowed while the parents/guardians are not at home.
- Never enter the house when you find the door ajar or a window open.
- If your child is being followed by a stranger, on foot or by car, teach your child that they should run to the nearest public place, business, or safe house.

### ***HOUSE RULES***

You and your children should agree on rules about what they will do when they are alone.

Some of these rules may involve:

1. How long they may talk on the phone.
2. How much TV they may watch and which shows.
3. Whether they should call you when they get home or if they decide to leave the house.
4. What chores they should do before play time.
5. Setting aside a time for homework.
6. What snacks they may have.
7. Kitchen rules, including whether they may use the stove, other appliances, or sharp knives.



## Swimming/Water Safety

- When choosing a swimming instructor for your child, choose only experienced qualified instructors.
- There should be continuous adult supervision any time your child is near water.
- Make sure there is a person trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on site at all times.
- Do not allow your child to engage in horse playing.
- Diving should not be allowed unless the depth of the water has been determined and there are no underwater hazards.
- Use only approved life preservers. Air mattresses, inner tubes or inflatable toys are not dependable life preservers. If these devices deflate, or your child slips off, he/she could be in serious trouble.
- Be extremely cautious while using spas and hot tubs. They can be dangerous for young children who can easily drown or become overheated during their use. Always check the manufacturer's warnings and directions for use by children.
- Make sure you are always aware of the weather conditions and do not allow swimming during a lightning storm.
- If you have a backyard swimming pool it should be enclosed with high and locked fences on all sides. Check with the appropriate city or state agency to make sure you are following your jurisdiction's laws for the installation of a pool.
- If your pool has a cover, make sure it is completely removed before swimming. Your child may fall through the cover and become trapped underneath.
- A child should always wear a life jacket when riding in a boat. For more information, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department website has Boating Safety Tips, visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/faq/learning/boater\\_education/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/faq/learning/boater_education/).



## Finding a Babysitter

- Find a trusted family member/friend.
- Get recommendations from friends.
- Trade childcare with friends who have kids.
- Check the references given by the babysitter.
- Listen to your child's input about the babysitter.
- Try to choose only babysitters who are trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid.
- Observe how the babysitter interacts with your child/children.
- Check prospects on the Texas Department of Public Safety's website for the registered sex offender's database, visit

[https://records.txdps.state.tx.us/DPS\\_WEB/Sor/index.aspx](https://records.txdps.state.tx.us/DPS_WEB/Sor/index.aspx)

- Put together a detailed notebook and include the following items:
  - Parent's / Guardians names
  - Your home address
  - Parent's home and cellular phone numbers
  - **EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBER** (9-1-1)
  - Name and phone number of family doctor/pediatrician
  - Name and phone numbers for neighbors and close relatives
  - **POISON CONTROL** (1-800-222-1222)
  - Location of exits
  - Location of door keys
  - Location of first aid supplies
  - Food and drug allergies
  - Special medical information
  - Children's bedtimes
  - Any food or drink to be given or not given to the children
- Meet with the sitter at least fifteen minutes prior to leaving home. Make sure you cover the following:
  - Your childcare expectations
  - Items listed in the recommended notebook from above
  - Your child's usual routine
  - Your location and how to reach you
  - How to calm your child if crying
  - How to handle misbehaviors
  - Any other special instructions unique to your situation



## Guide for Teenagers Babysitting

- Only baby-sit for parents/guardians you and your parents know and trust.
- Make sure you have important phone numbers and instructions on how to care for the children written down.
- Keep all doors and windows locked at all times.
- DO NOT open the door for anyone unless you personally know the person.
- If nighttime, turn on the porch and outside lights.
- If you must leave the house for any reason, take the kid(s) with you.
- Have a mental fire drill plan. Develop more than one way out of the house in case of a fire.
- In case of a fire:
  - Sound the alarm, yell FIRE as loudly as possible.
  - If safe, close the door to the area where the fire is.
  - Get everyone out of the house as quickly as possible.
  - Keep all the children together and go to a meeting point outside.
  - Call 9-1-1.
- Put together a detailed notebook and include the following items:
  - Parent's / Guardians names
  - Your home address
  - Parent's home and cellular phone numbers
  - **EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBER (9-1-1)**
  - Name and phone number of family doctor/pediatrician
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