

KNOW THE RULES...

For Child Safety in AMUSEMENT OR THEME PARKS



Family outings are occasions that can be wonderful times for bonding and spending quality time together. And family outings to amusement and theme parks can be special times that leave children with lifelong memories of "meeting" their favorite cartoon character or having their own "real-life" action adventure. It's a "family-favorite" vacation that is enjoyed by millions each year. In fact, nearly 161 million people visited the nation's theme parks in 1997, and that number is expected to rise to more than 182 million parkgoers by 2010.¹

As a parent, you know that such outings can also be sources of stress and concern for family members visiting an area with so many new sights and sounds. It's easy for both adults and children to become distracted by all the excitement and attractions. Taking the time to plan your trip and including your children in that process will help make your outing in the park a more enjoyable one from start to finish. Here are a few steps that you and your children can take to help ensure those happy memories.

Before going to the park, tell your children . . .

- ~ to enjoy their outing while paying careful attention to where they are and who they are with at all times.
- ~ that they should not be alone in the park or become isolated with anyone, even characters in costume. Also tell them not to accept any prizes, offers, or gifts from anyone until they have **checked first** with you. Children should also be cautioned not to engage in conversation with or offer assistance to anyone until they have checked with you first.
- ~ to **tell** you if anyone approaches them or makes them feel uncomfortable. Tell your children that if they are approached by anyone who tries to take them away to yell, "**This person is not my father (mother)!**"
- ~ that if you become separated while in the park to go to the closest "Help/Information Center" to ask the people there to "find my parents and bring them to me here at this Center" or, in the case of older children, make the "Help/Information Center" the spot where you can "meet up." Make sure your children understand that they should never search for you on their own or look for you outside the park, especially in the parking lot.
- ~ that these rules also apply when they are taking part in a field trip through their school or youth group. And if you are not joining them for that trip, they need to check first with and tell the responsible adult in charge or a designated chaperone if anything is wrong.

As a parent you should . . .

~ get information about the park prior to your trip, and review the park guidelines, particularly those regarding lost children. Discuss the information as a family, including what to do if you become separated. Ask your children what they would do in certain situations, and practice appropriate actions and responses with your children.



- ~ get a map of the park immediately upon arriving, identify the "Help/Information Centers" throughout, and reinforce the idea that these are the places for children to go to in case you become separated in the park. Making a plan beforehand, of what to do in case you are separated, should greatly speed a reunion.
- ~ talk to your children about who can help them if they become lost, need assistance, or are in trouble. Examples of these people may be park personnel with nametags or mothers with children. Children should never go off alone with anyone.
- ~ **not** allow your children to wear clothing or carry items on which their names are displayed.
- ~ make sure that your children carry some form of identification and family/emergency contact information with them in case they become separated from you or need assistance.
- ~ consider dressing your children in or asking them to wear brightly colored clothes so that they may be more easily spotted in the park.
- ~ accompany young children on rides in the park. Older children should stay in groups and **take a friend** with them wherever they go in the park. If you decide to let young children go on rides without you, wait with them in line, watch them enter the ride, and immediately meet them when they exit the ride.
- ~ always accompany younger children to restrooms in the park. Older children should not go to the restroom alone.
- ~ immediately report any suspicious or inappropriate behavior to authorities.
- ~ make certain that your children have change to use the telephone. If you have a cellular telephone or pager, make certain your children know those numbers and that these devices are activated so your children may call you if they become lost. Parents may wish to use two-way radios while in the park, so that family members can stay in touch with each other.
- ~ immediately report your children as being missing if you become separated in the park, and be prepared to give an accurate and detailed description of your children. You should carry a current photograph and be able to accurately describe the clothing that the children are wearing.
- ~ make certain that there is going to be qualified supervision of the children by responsible adults, if you are considering granting permission for your child to take part in a field trip to an amusement or theme park.

¹ Gegax, T. Trent. "Booming Amusement Parks: The Theme is Extreme Forever Young." *Newsweek*, U.S. Edition, March 30, 1998, page 12.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information on missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals; distributes photographs and descriptions of missing children worldwide; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses on missing-person cases; and provides information on effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 USC § 5771 and 42 USC § 5780.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678), is available in Canada, Mexico, and the United States for those who have information on missing and exploited children. The "phone free" number when dialing from other countries is 00-800-0843-5678. The CyberTipline® for online reporting is available worldwide at www.cybertipline.com. The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number is 703-274-3900. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2200. The NCMEC web-site address is www.missingkids.com. For information on the services offered by our NCMEC branches, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 561-848-1900, Kansas City at 816-756-5422, New York at 585-242-0900, and South Carolina at 803-254-2326.

A number of publications, addressing various aspects of the missing- and exploited-child issue, are available free of charge in single copies by contacting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Publications Department at Charles B. Wang International Children's Building, 699 Prince Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3175, U.S.A.



1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)

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