



## Beware the Predator - Summer Safety Tips

By: John L. Terry, III

With summer approaching and more kids playing outdoors, recent headlines and several high profile arrests are sadly pointing to the fact that sexual predators are once again coming out of their homes to prey on women, and increasingly on children in the Arkansas River Valley.

Today, our parks and playgrounds, and even our neighborhoods are not as "safe" as they were just a decade or so ago, and our children should be supervised at all times. Abduction and sexual assault of children is becoming an increasing problem, even in rural areas of the country. Predators know no boundaries, and they go to where they can find ready access to potential victims.

That means we as a community have to be on guard, and each of us do our part to watch out for one of our most valuable resources, our children. It only takes a moment for a child to be lured away to become a predator's plaything, or something even worse. Victims suffer not only physical pain, but carry with them emotional scars that can last a long time.

These predators use a variety of common lures to trick young children to go with them. A few of the most common used are the "lost pet" lure, the "asking for directions" lure, and offering children candy, toys or money. Parents and guardians should teach their children to be aware of these lures, and to understand that there are people in society who get their pleasure from harming children. Here are some things you can discuss with your children.

### The Lost Pet Lure

Frequently a predator will approach a young child or a group of young children and pretend that he has lost his pet. He will ask the child or children to search the area, usually a secluded or wooded area, to find the pet. To entice the lure, the predator will often tell a group of children he will offer a cash reward to the child who finds his pet.

Prior to starting this "Lure", the predator will have hidden the pet somewhere in the woods where it is not easily visible and then the predator will guide one of the children in that direction during the search, isolating the child and the predator from the safety of others. Once the pet has been found, the predator will ask the child to help him take the dog back to the car, and as soon as the predator gets back to the car, then he will grab the child and they will disappear.

Predators prey on children's natural attraction to pets and their willingness to help. Children should never help someone they don't know look for a pet, and should never leave their playmates to go alone with anyone. If they are asked to help take a lost pet to a stranger's car, they should run away immediately and report the incident to their parents or authorities.

### Asking for Directions

Predators also will use the approach of asking for directions to a certain nearby place. He will frequently have a map out and will appear to be lost. The predator will park (or locate himself) in an area that is close to where children are playing. He will ask a child to show him on the map where the street or place is located and appear to be confused on how to get there. He will ask the child to drive or walk with him



to show him exactly how to get to the street or the place. Once the child has entered the predator's vehicle, it is usually the last time the child is seen.

Again, predators are preying on the child's natural desire to help, and using the familiarity of their local neighborhood or surroundings to drop their guard. A child should learn to never talk to anyone asking for directions and to never accompany any stranger in a vehicle, and should report any such incident to their parents or authorities.

#### Offering Candy or Toys

Predators often will approach a young child and offer to give the child a piece of candy or an expensive toy. Young boys are particularly vulnerable to offers of new electronic games or remote controlled cars or trucks. The predator will show the child the toy and let him play with it for a while. Then the predator will tell the child that he has another toy just like the one they are playing with and if they go back to the vehicle they can get it and play together. Often the child is eager to see the second toy and will walk with the predator back to the vehicle to get the second toy. Once there, the predator grabs the child and puts him into the vehicle and drives off.

Children must learn to never accept anything offered by a stranger no matter how nice it looks or how much they want to play with it. They must never leave with a stranger, but should run away and notify their parents and authorities of the incident.

Education is key to helping our children understand the dangers that our out there, and teaching them to be "danger aware" while playing is a pro-active step you can take to help avoid your child becoming a victim of sexual predators. As a community, we need to keep our eyes and ears open, and be on the alert. If you see suspicious activity at a park, playground, or in your neighborhood, notify law enforcement immediately.

Enjoy your summer, and let's all do our part to assure that all our children can do the same.

**About the author:** John Terry is a certified Kid-Safe and Woman-Safe consultant with the National Security Alliance. He is also a Chaplain with the Martial Arts Chaplains Association, a member of the Christian Black Belt Association, and co-owner of River Valley Martial Arts ([www.rivervalleymartialarts.com](http://www.rivervalleymartialarts.com)). Through the NSA, John offers "kid-safe" and "woman-safe" educational workshops on danger awareness to local schools, civic and church groups. He is also a coordinator for the NSA's Rapid Child Search program. For details, visit the Cross and Shield website ([www.crossandshield.org](http://www.crossandshield.org)). To schedule an educational workshop, John may be reached at 478-968-1708 or [rivervalleykidsafe@imga.com](mailto:rivervalleykidsafe@imga.com).