

Threat of abductions leads to sheriff's warning

In light of recent attempted child abduction incidents that have occurred in surrounding Northern Nevada and California communities, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office is providing the following information.

In the last two months, there have been several incidents of suspicious activity related to possible attempted abductions in Reno, Sparks, Carson City and South Lake Tahoe.

The majority of incidents have occurred while children/teens were walking to or from school. Suspects have engaged children/teens in conversation, and attempted to get them to leave with them on foot or in a vehicle. No children have gone with the subjects.

Suspect descriptions have ranged from young male Caucasians, to middle-aged Hispanic males, and in one incident, a middle aged Caucasian female.

Vehicle descriptions have included a large white van, a dark-colored SUV, a white Chevy pickup with black rims, and a Lexus.

Reno police have arrested three suspects and Sparks police have arrested one suspect whom they believe responsible for some of the incidents. Their investigations are still ongoing.

There have been no related incidents reported in Douglas County; however in an effort to educate parents and children on actions to increase personal safety, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office offers the following tips.

Safety information for children/teens:

Always let parents know where you are going, who you will be

with and what time you will arrive home.

Always get permission from a parent before leaving home, even if going to a nearby location.

Try to avoid walking alone – use the “buddy system”.

Never hitchhike.

Avoid short cuts through alleys, greenbelts, deserted parks or buildings. Never play in these isolated areas.

Always walk near lights and stay in public and open areas at night.

Always walk on the sidewalk or as far away from the roadway as possible. Walk facing toward traffic so you can see vehicles approaching.

If someone pulls up near you in a car, and asks you to come over so they can talk to you, do not approach the car. Tell them to go talk to an adult. Remember, adults should never ask kids for help, they should always ask another adult.

Trust your instincts – recognize and report suspicious behavior. Go somewhere safe if you feel fearful of someone.

If you see someone unusual hanging around a schoolyard, park, bus stop, or location where children or teens hang out, tell your parents.

Remember descriptions of suspicious vehicles or persons. If you can read the license plate, write it down. Write it in the dirt or snow if no pen or paper is available.

Safety information for adults/parents:

Never leave children under 6 years old unattended.

Avoid clothing or toys with child’s name on it (suspects can use this as an intro when approaching a child by calling

him/her by their name).

Identify safe houses in your neighborhood that your child can go to if frightened or chased.

Never leave a child alone in a public place.

Always accompany your child into public restrooms.

Always go with your child to supervise door-to-door activities such as fundraising or Halloween

Make it a family rule that your child must let you know where they are at all times.

Make sure your children know their last name, phone number, and address.

Make sure your child knows how to dial 911.

Let your child know it is all right to say "no" to an adult if asked to do something they are not comfortable doing.

Teach children that adults should never need or ask for help from children for any reason (e.g. ask for directions, asking for help find an animal, etc).

Explain that if an adult or child ever asks them to "keep a secret" it is OK for them to discuss it with a parent/trusted adult.

Actions if approached/abducted:

Parents should teach the following actions to their children in case they are approached or abducted by a stranger.

If a car pulls up beside a child, teach the child to move away from the car. Tell children to run in the opposite direction the car is facing.

If taken by a stranger, to yell specific phrases such as,

“Help, I don’t know this person!”, “I need your help”, or “I’m being kidnapped!” They can also yell “fire” which usually gets everyone’s attention quickly, and then follow up with one of the previous phrases.

If grabbed by a stranger, drop their weight by quickly squatting, twist their body, stretch out their body, kick/punch/scratch/bite at the abductor, and scream “Help! I need your help, I’m being kidnapped!”

If grabbed in a store, yell for a cashier or other adult, and to shatter merchandise and knock down displays. Tell child to try to grab onto the nearest person.

If forced into a car or building, scream and shatter objects and windows.

If abducted in a parking lot, pound on cars to set off car alarms, and go under a parked car if possible.

If abducted into a car, quickly jump into backseat and go out a back door.

If locked in a trunk, push out taillights and let wires dangle out.

If locked in an apartment or house, try all doors and windows for escape. Create an emergency situation (flood bathroom, break windows, set off alarms).

Never stop fighting back and always keep looking for an escape route.