

## Take 25

By Radha Selvester for North Florida School Days May 2015

May 25 is National Missing Children's Day. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) encourages parents to "take 25" minutes every year on May 25<sup>th</sup> to go over basic safety rules with their children. As children grow, the safety messages grow more sophisticated so having an "annual safety check-up" with your children is a great concept to establish with your family.

NCMEC offers lots of great resources to help you have these conversations. They are age specific – kids, tweens, and teens. All of their literature is available in both English and Spanish. What appears obvious to an adult, isn't necessarily what makes sense to a child so reminding them about basic safety on a regular basis could save their lives.

A good example from the hand-out 25 Ways to Make Kids Safer is #25. "Teach your children that if anyone tries to grab them, they should make a scene and make every effort to get away by kicking, screaming, and resisting." Most children have been taught to be polite, do what adults tell them to do, and to NOT scream or kick. They need to be reminded that there are circumstances where they SHOULD kick and scream. When I do my Safe Place presentations to children in schools and summer camps, I tell them that I know they are all polite and well behaved but I am giving them permission to kick and scream and fight if someone is trying to steal them. I tell them about a 7 year old girl in Georgia who was snatched by a would-be kidnapper in Wal-Mart a couple years ago. She kicked and screamed so much she was able to escape. The elementary school children feel empowered by this story. But I remind them she wouldn't have been in a position to be taken if she hadn't wandered away from her mother. So even if Mom is shopping for something boring like toilet paper, children should not leave parents even to check out the toy department of the store.

Some of the other key points of the "Take 25" campaign include:

- Teaching children their full names, addresses, phone numbers, and parents' names
- Keeping the computer in a common area where parents can see what sites children are visiting
- Walking through your neighborhood with children to show them which homes they may visit without you
- Teaching children to stay away from vehicles
- Discussing "what if" scenarios – how could children get help if something unexpected happened

For more information about the "Take 25" campaign, please visit [www.take25.org](http://www.take25.org). They offer many resources and discussion guides. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children web site is also a great source of information: [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com). You can also call them to report a missing child at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678).

To schedule a Safe Place presentation for your youth group, please contact Radha Selvester at (352) 244-0628 x3865. These interactive presentations are ideal for summer camp groups, scouts, church

groups, and classrooms. The information is age appropriate and children/teens receive gifts and information to take home with them at no charge.

If you are having trouble with your children following the rules that keep them safe, please contact CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services to inquire about Family Action Counseling (age 6-17) or CDS Interface Youth Shelter (age 10-17). (352) 244-0628 or 0618 [www.cdsfl.org](http://www.cdsfl.org) Runaway behavior, breaking curfew, cutting school, and impulsive dangerous behaviors are some examples of the kinds of problems CDS counselors can help.

