

Missing children; A national tragedy that can be prevented

(Continued from Page B16)

- Stress that no one has the right to touch him or make him feel uncomfortable. Children should know they have the right to say "no."
- Encourage children to tell when any adult asks them to keep a "secret," offers them gifts, or wants to take pictures of them.
- Outline what a child should do when he can't find you. Teach a child never to leave the place he is (grocery, department store, ball park) without you because you will never go home without him. Also teach him that mom and dad have first names, that the police are his friends, and how to listen for his name on the loudspeaker or intercom system.

There are also a number of procedures parents can teach themselves to help protect their children from abduction. Parents should make it a point to know their children's friends. Being able to pinpoint where and with whom

your child spends time may be crucial in an emergency.

Know where your child is at all times. Don't leave young children unattended.

Parents should be involved in their children's activities. Your active participation in your child's world not only shows your interest and support, it also allows you the opportunity to know what she does with her time. This information may be important in an effort to find her.

Listen when your child tells you she does not want to be with someone. Children's likes and dislikes are based on their experiences. When they say they don't like someone or some activity, there is usually a reason why and parents should investigate.

Parents need to be sensitive to changes in a child's behavior or attitude. There is probably a reason for the change. Encourage

open communication and do not belittle any fear or concern your child may express to you. Knowing your child is the first step in identifying changes in moods or behavior. A child who has been approached or abused may feel anxious or guilty. She may avoid certain individuals and activities. If you treat her with respect and support when she shares her feelings, she will be more likely to tell you about her problems.

Children need to know where they may go and with whom. Be very specific and very clear. Children who understand the rules are more likely to follow them.

Parents should have identification materials ready. These include fingerprints, a recent full-body photograph and dental records.

Families should have an emergency plan and a family code word. An emergency plan and a family code word agreed on

beforehand not only create a united effort, they offer structure and direction in an emotionally tense time.

The emergency plan describes in simple terms what you will do and what you want your child to do if she is abducted. The plan would describe your efforts to find her (contacting police, friends and neighbors) and her efforts to reach you (calling you or a 911 number, approaching a mother with children for help, screaming in public). A clear and simple plan will reassure your child that you will keep trying to find her and that she should keep trying to contact you.

A family code word identifies

friends. If a person does not know the family code word, the child will know not to go with him or her.

When a child is missing, the family emergency plan should guide everyone's actions. Parents should:

- Report the child missing as soon as possible. The first 24 hours are crucial. Contact the local police first, then the FBI.

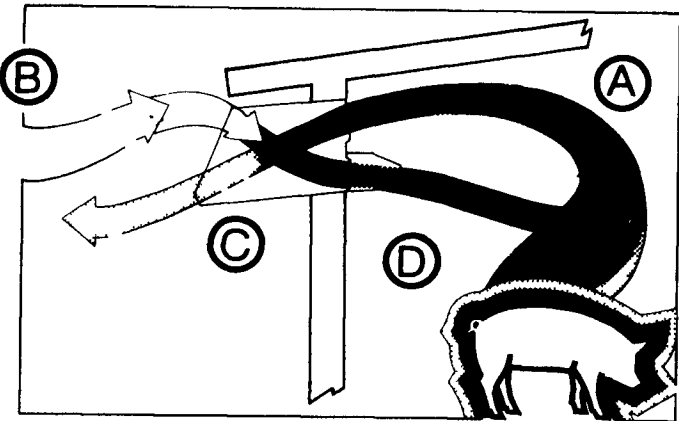
- Contact the local media. Spreading the word about the disappearance increases the chances someone will see the child.

- Contact organizations that help parents find missing children. Start with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.



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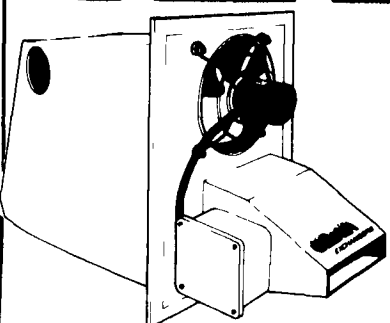
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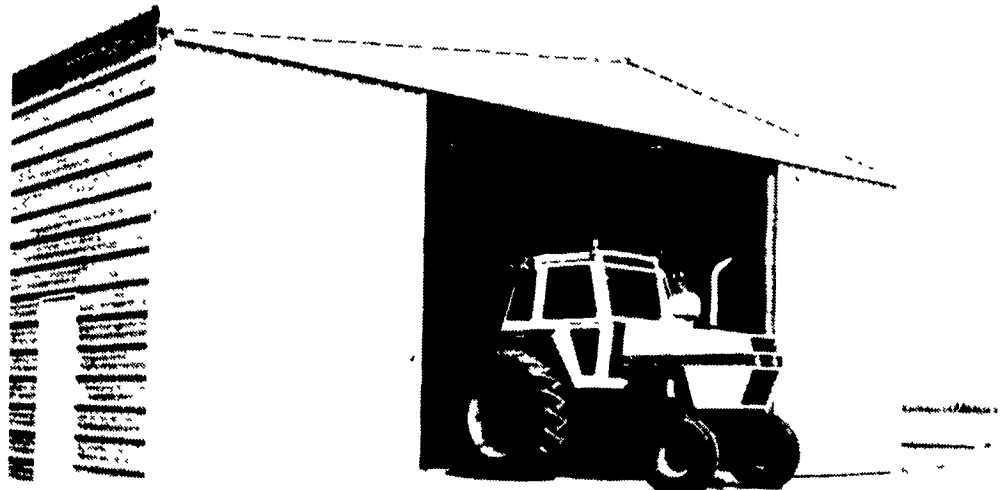
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