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Q: So many stranger kidnappings! How can I protect my four-year-old?

A: Constant vigilance is the only solution for protecting children six and under, who need to feel that the world — including strangers — is a friendly place. At around five, start teaching one simple rule: your child must never go with anyone, have made it absolutely clear they should never do so. At age six, with the help of friends, set up practice kidnapping scenarios: "Help to find my lost dog," "Mommy is waiting at the store for you" — that kind of thing. The more rehearsals, the better.

Q: We have a four-year-old; we also have a pool. We think we've taken all precautions — locked gate, high fence; alarms at poolside, and so on. Any not-so-obvious protections we should know about?**A:** Here are a few rules of thumb:

- At a gathering, make a laminated sign with each young child's name on it. The adult holding that sign ONLY watches that particular child, until the sign gets handed to another adult.
- Beware the *tete a tete*: adult and child are alone by the pool, and the adult falls asleep in the sun.
- Keep underwater episodes brief. Very young children can swallow so much water involuntarily that it disturbs their blood and brain chemistry, so that they become weak and disoriented and easily drown.

Q: All of my sisters' young children are obese. How can I tell if my one-year-old starts gaining too much weight? And what can I do to help her stay in the normal range?**A:** Keep in mind what's normal. As a society, we seemed to have forgotten!

- Children's weight gain is supposed to slow down starting at a year of age, and they should look less, not more, chubby each year up to age six, when they should look downright skinny.
- Appetite slows down, too, at about a year of age. Allow 16-24 ounces of milk a day, and only water (not juice or soda) to drink for thirst. Expect her to eat a good breakfast, a fair lunch, very little dinner, and no *routine* snacks — only when a meal is skipped or delayed. One portion of food is the size of her palm or fist.

Q: I don't want my 18-month-old to grow up into one of those recalcitrant three-year-olds who's still in diapers. Anything I can do now to prevent this?**A:** Potty refusal allows the child to feel powerful. What works: reverse the usual diaper changing scenario: Be businesslike, not social, playful, or intimate. Change his diaper at your convenience, not his. Don't hesitate (without being mean or angry) to interrupt your little boy's play to do so — and without apologies, excuses, or asking his permission by adding, "OK?" When your little boy is old enough to figure out how to use the potty, he'll regard it as a way to enhance, rather than to lose, his sense of being in charge.