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Summer Is Here and Children Are Out of School!

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Why is it important to always know the parents of the children who's house your own child will be playing at?

While it becomes more and more difficult as a child grows older to always know your child's friends or friend's parents for that matter, at age seven it is quite necessary. Keeping your child safe is your responsibility. Gaining knowledge about another child and his or her parent/s is an important way to obtain information that may affect your child's safety. You do not have to be best friends with the parents, but it is a good idea to know something about them. What activities are acceptable or unacceptable for the children? Are they supervised at all times? Are outings acceptable and, if so, where? These are some of the questions that should be answered before leaving your child at another person's home. Networking with the parents of your children's friends is also a good way to learn more about similar belief and value systems. Any responsible parent should understand your concern and caution.

What kinds of things can happen if a parent doesn't follow this "rule"?

The rules you enforce in your home may be entirely different than those enforced in another's home. Always voice your concerns and communicate your rules concerning swimming pools, trampolines and playing outside. It is

your right as a parent to ask a family if they own guns and how they are secured. Remember, paintball and air guns are potential dangers to your child as well.

How can a parent explain this to a child without scaring them, but still make them understand?

It is important to practice open communication with your child. By providing your child with ongoing communication, you will help them to understand the importance of a safe environment. You should not try to frighten your child with your precautions. On the contrary, your goal should be to make them more aware of their surroundings and teach them to exercise good judgment. It is critical that they understand how you make rules regarding their safety, even when you are not present. You can create a safer environment by coordinating the visit with the other child's parent. Explain to your child that this will provide you with an opportunity to meet the other child's parents and to be confident that their home is as safe as yours.

What's a polite way for the parent to decline the invitation without offending the other parents? Or should they even worry about that?

It should not be offensive to another parent if you decline an invitation for your child to play

at another child's home because you do not know them well enough. In fact, most parents will understand your concerns because they share them. If you decline an invitation because you do not feel comfortable with the parents, simply offer to have the child play at your home.

When is a child old enough to safely play at someone's house without the parent knowing the child's parents? Should you meet the parents in person, or can a phone "interview" be just as helpful? If a phone call is okay, what are some important questions for the parent to ask?

Meeting the parents of your 7-year-old child's friend in person, as well as visiting the family's home is necessary. Once your child is older and can understand unsafe situations, a phone interview may be alright, but meeting in person is always best. There are important questions a parent should ask: What activities are acceptable or unacceptable for the children? Are they supervised at all times? Are outings acceptable and, if so, where? What rules are enforced regarding swimming pools, trampolines or playing outside? Do they have weapons in the house? Are they secured?

After asking these questions, it is very important for you to let the parent know that you expect specific rules to be followed regarding your child. After discussing all concerns with the parent, be sure to talk with your child about your concerns and the agreements. Keeping your child informed will help you keep your child safe.

Though you can never be sure others will apply these rules as you would, you will have done a great deal to help educate your child. This knowledge will help them to identify potentially dangerous situations and how to remove themselves from that danger. Remember, your child counts on you to ensure their safety!