

What parents need to know

These tips are excerpted from *For health care professionals:
Guidelines on prevention of and response to infant abductions.*

The guidelines listed below provide good, sound parenting techniques to help prevent abduction of babies both while in the health care facility and once taken home.

While in the health care facility

1. Inquire about security procedures used by the facility at some point **before** the birth of your baby. Request a copy of the facility's written guidelines about special care and security procedures in the maternity unit. Know all of the facility's procedures in place to safeguard your baby while staying in that facility.
2. Ask again, after admission, about the facility's protocols concerning the routine nursery procedures, feeding and visitation hours, and security measures.
3. Be deliberately watchful over your newborn baby. While it is normal for new parents to be anxious, it is important to channel that energy into positive vigilance and keep your baby within direct line of sight.
4. Do not leave your baby out of your direct line of sight even when you go to the restroom or take a nap. If you leave the room or plan to go to sleep, alert the nurses to take your baby back to the nursery or have a trusted family member watch your baby. When possible keep your baby's bassinet on the side of your bed away from the door(s) leading out of the room.
5. Do not give your baby to **anyone** without properly verified identification as issued by that facility. Find out what additional or special identification is being worn to further identify facility personnel who have authority to transport your baby. Speak to a person in authority, such as a unit director or charge nurse, if you have any questions or concerns.
6. Become familiar with the staff who work in the maternity unit. During short stays in the facility, ask to be introduced to the nurse assigned to your baby and you.
7. Question unfamiliar people entering your room or inquiring about your baby — even if they are in the facility's attire or seem to have a reason for being there. Immediately alert the nurses' station.
8. Determine where your baby will be when taken for tests and how long the tests will take. Find out who has authorized the tests. It is appropriate to go with your baby to observe the procedure if you are uncomfortable with anyone who requests to take your baby, are unable to clarify what testing is being done or do not know why your baby is being taken from your room. If you are unable to accompany your baby, have a trusted family member go along.
9. Have at least one color photograph of your baby with a full, front-face view, for your records to take home. Also, since it is recommended health care facilities footprint newborn babies, ask for a set to take home. And compile a complete written description of your baby including hair and eye color, length, weight, date of birth and specific physical characteristics.
10. Request a set of written guidelines, at some point **after** the birth of your baby but **before** discharge from the facility, about the procedures for any follow-up care extended by the facility scheduled to take place in your home.

Once at home

1. Do not allow anyone into your home who says he or she is affiliated with the facility without properly verified identification as issued by that facility. Find out what additional or special identification is being worn to further identify those staff members who have authority to enter your home.
2. Consider the risk you may be taking when permitting your baby's birth announcement to be published in the newspaper or online. Birth announcements should never include the family's home address and be limited to the parents' surname(s). In general, birth announcements in newspapers are not endorsed by most experts. **Also use caution when communicating with those on social media and carefully consider what you post on your social media pages about your baby and you. Specifically do not include the mother's first name or home location when posting the announcement, and remember what information is already posted in online profiles that could provide these details.**
3. Know the use of outdoor announcements, such as signs, balloons, large floral wreaths and other lawn ornaments, are not recommended to announce a birth because they call attention to the presence of a new baby in the home.
4. Allow only people into your home who are well-known by the mother. It is ill advised to allow anyone into your home who is just a mere or recent acquaintance, especially if met briefly since you became pregnant or gave birth to your baby. There have been several cases in which an abductor has made initial contact with a mother and baby in the health care facility setting and then subsequently abducted the baby from the family home. If anyone should arrive at the home claiming to be affiliated with the health care facility where the baby was born or other health care provider, remember to follow the procedures outlined above. A high degree of diligence should be exercised by family members when home with the baby. The baby's family is the domestic security team for their family. All family members should be sensitive to any suspicious visitors.

In addition there have been cases in which initial contact with a mother and baby was made in other settings such as clinics, doctors' offices, shopping malls and bus stations. When taking your baby out, whenever possible, take a trusted friend or family member with you as an extra set of hands and eyes to protect and constantly observe your baby. **Never** leave a child alone in a motor vehicle even if just for a few moments to run a short errand, such as paying for gas, as it is too easy for someone to steal the car. Always take the child with you. And never let someone you don't know pick up or hold your child.

Note: The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® encourages the distribution of the English- and Spanish-language version of "What parents need to know" by health care facilities to patients who will be giving birth to infants in their facility. These tips and NCMEC's reprint policy are found at www.missingkids.com/InfantAbduction.

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www.missingkids.com

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