



Safe Child Scheme – a guide to getting started

By Charlie Monkcom, Employment Policies and Business Practices Advisor, NSPCC

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Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.

Charlie Monkcom is the Employment Policies and Business Practices Advisor for the NSPCC. He works in partnership with UK businesses to promote NSPCC objectives.

UK businesses play a major social role as providers of employment opportunities, wealth and goods and services. Their impact is felt in every community and household.

Charlie is working to encourage businesses to make their own contributions to making the UK more child-friendly. He strives to persuade people working in business to take action to protect children and promote children's well-being and to ensure the participation of children in professional and civic life.

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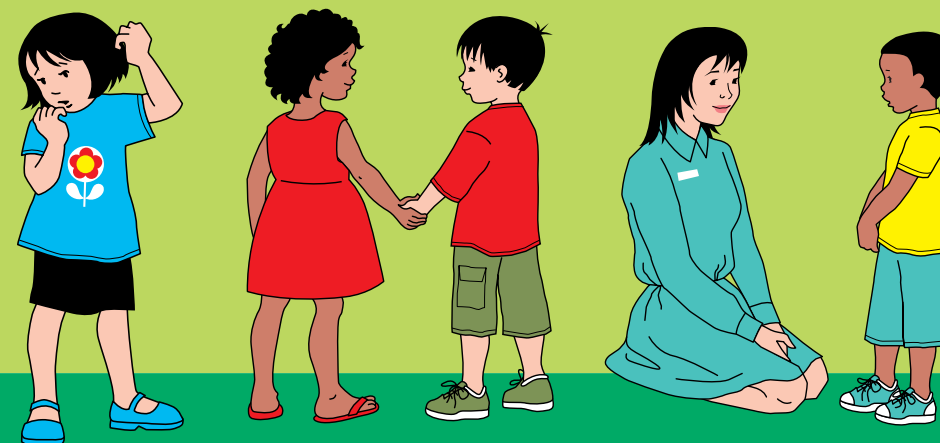
David Ward

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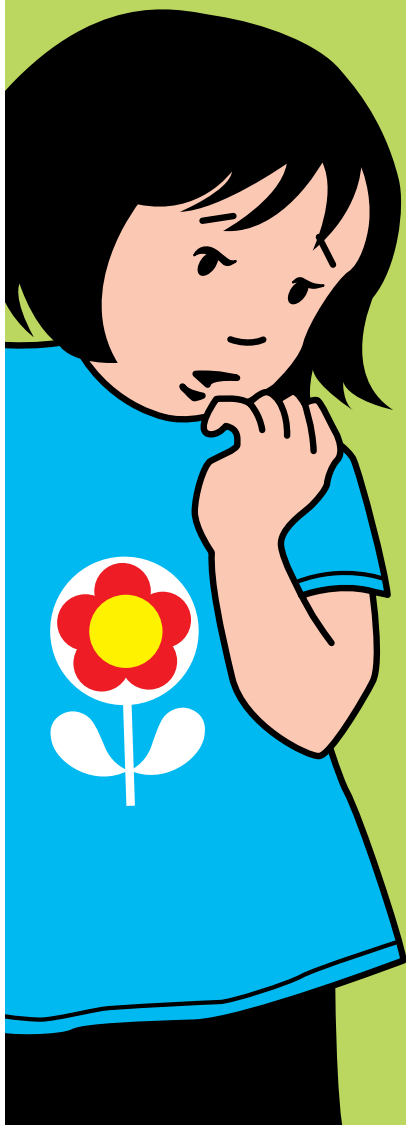
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Contents

- 4 Introduction
- 6 What is the Safe Child Scheme?
- 7 How you can start a Safe Child Scheme
- 8 What to do - the co-ordinated approach of the Safe Child Scheme
- 10 How to implement your Safe Child Scheme
- 11 How to promote your Safe Child Scheme
- 13 How to monitor the success of your Safe Child Scheme
- 13 How to sustain interest in your Safe Child Scheme
- 14 How to get the most from your Safe Child Scheme
- 15 Showing the Safe Child Scheme video
- 16 About the NSPCC



Introduction



“The Safe Child Scheme is a unique initiative designed to minimise danger and anxiety when children become separated from their families in busy shopping centres, by ensuring they are reunited as quickly as possible.”

West Mercia Constabulary

Young children are occasionally separated from their parents and carers when in public spaces and particularly when these are crowded. This can cause distress to both parents and their children even when the separation lasts only for a few minutes.

The purpose of this booklet is to set out a common framework for the setting up and running of Safe Child Schemes throughout the UK. It has been written to accompany the video *Safe Child Scheme - a guide to getting started*. The guidelines are based on ‘best practice’, drawn up when the Safe Child Scheme was first developed and tried and tested by local schemes.

The booklet and accompanying video have been produced for local agencies that can take the lead in organising Safe Child Schemes eg local police services, local authority safety officers, and town centre management. The booklet has been largely written with retail centres in mind, but can be applied to any organisation wishing to implement a Safe Child Scheme.

The aim is that Safe Child Schemes everywhere will operate as consistently as possible with common procedures and standards of care. We hope that the “holding hands” logo, as featured on the front cover of the guide, will become more widely used and recognised. This will give parents, carers and children the assurance that the Safe Child Scheme is running in a particular location and that the operation of the scheme is broadly the same wherever it is in place.

Nevertheless, the Safe Child Scheme is sufficiently adaptable to cater for local circumstances such as the size of the area being covered and the resources of the organisations involved locally. The majority of schemes developed so far have been in shopping centres, retail parks or in town centres. In these schemes it is young children, usually under the age of seven, who are most likely to become separated from their parents or carers.

The Safe Child Scheme could be used by transport providers, such as airports, and events managers. In these cases, the scheme may apply to older children.

Safe Child Schemes are relatively inexpensive to establish. Organisations essentially need to give their time. While there are some printing and marketing costs, generally running costs tend to be low. The Scheme makes use of existing local infrastructure and relationships – such as town centre and safety partnerships.

To order a copy of the accompanying video, please contact:

**NSPCC Publications and Information Unit
Weston House
42 Curtain Road
London
EC2A 3NH**

Tel: 020 7825 2775 or order online at
www.nspcc.org.uk/inform
Price: £39.95 inc VAT + p&p.

What is the Safe Child Scheme?

The Safe Child Scheme was originally developed by PC Chris Parsons OBE, who wanted to do something following the murder of James Bulger on 12 February 1993. He realised that it was not uncommon for children to become separated from their parents when shopping and that this could not only put children at risk, but was often a very stressful and upsetting experience for both children and parents.

Dr Diana Moore, a consultant clinical child psychologist with the Child and Family Service of Shropshire's Mental Health NHS Trust, worked with PC Parsons to undertake research and develop a response.

The essence of the Safe Child Scheme, devised by PC Parsons and Dr Moore, is that a co-ordinated response involving a plan of action from the whole community is required - particularly retail staff, parents and children. They drew up procedures for retail staff that would be clear and simple and above all compatible with actions taken by children and their parents or carers.

The result was the Safe Child Scheme, launched in Shrewsbury in December 1993. The scheme has been adopted by many shopping centres and other venues and is supported by police forces throughout the UK.

What are the benefits of the Safe Child Scheme?

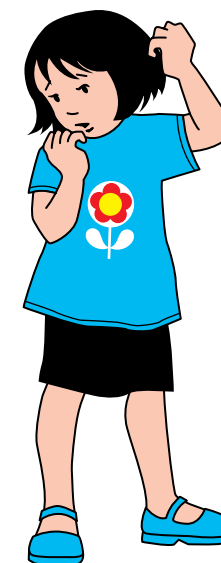
- Children and their parents can feel and be safer when in public places.
- The businesses involved are acting in a socially responsible way that can improve their public profile.
- The scheme provides a small and welcome enhancement to the role of staff working in public places. Many staff are parents themselves.
- It relieves the police from becoming directly involved in instances when children are temporarily lost.
- It helps local government and other bodies fulfil their community safety responsibilities.
- A partnership widens social responsibility for taking care of children.

How can you start a Safe Child Scheme?

Safe Child Schemes are started and organised at a local level. Different communities will operate the Scheme to suit their particular local needs and circumstances, although the basic principle of co-ordinated actions by staff, parents and children will remain the same.

In town centres and retail parks it is one organisation that tends to take the lead to start a scheme locally. In practice the Scheme will be more likely to succeed if different agencies are involved. These are usually drawn from:

- shops, businesses and leisure facilities
- shopping and town centre management
- the local police service
- chambers of commerce
- the local authority – particularly community safety officers
- event organisers
- schools, nurseries, playgroups and parent groups.



WHAT TO DO

the co-ordinated approach of the Safe Child Scheme

The Safe Child Scheme sets out compatible actions to be taken by children, parents and retail staff. Local partners need to agree these actions so that everyone involved follows these basic steps when a child becomes separated from his or her parent or carer.

Some of these actions will be common to all Safe Child Schemes. Others will be agreed locally depending on the nature and size of venue, the type of communication systems available and the personnel involved. The organisers of a local scheme will need to agree the operational steps best suited to their circumstances. They should concentrate on how they set about finding a separated child and how retail and security staff communicate with each other and with the police. Some procedures should be followed by every Safe Child Scheme. For example, there needs to be a procedure to ensure that the child is only released to a parent or other authorised adult.

For parents and children the steps they take and their interaction with staff will be broadly the same wherever the scheme is based.

There are two situations that trigger the operation of the Safe Child Scheme:

1. A child is found who has become separated from their parent or carer.
2. A parent or carer reports that their child is missing.



Steps when children become lost

The following steps should be followed by staff when a child is found who has become separated from his or her parent or carer:

- Get down to the child's level, smile and introduce yourself – remember the child might be very frightened.
- Make a brief search of your immediate area with the child.
- Take the child to a central point and stay with the child.
- Stay with the child until they are reunited with their parent or carer. If it is necessary to take the child to a separate room, ensure that at least two members of staff stay with the child.
- Fill in a description card (where appropriate) and give the details to the relevant people, including security staff who can circulate details to other shops in the area.
- Security staff can use the public address system, video cameras and staff to locate parents. At no stage should the child's identity be revealed.
- When children are claimed, confirm the identity of the parents and carers collecting the child and record details on the description card (if used).
- Do not release the child to anyone under the age of 16. People under the age of 16 cannot be held responsible for any harm that happens to a child in their care.
- If the child's parent/carer is not located after an agreed time period then contact the police.
- Not all children will be able to communicate clearly, and some children have special needs.

Steps to take when parents/carers report a lost child to a member of staff

- Ensure that you get a clear description of the child.
- Inform other staff including security personnel.
- Make a search of the surrounding area.
- Complete a description card (if used).
- Where appropriate direct staff to main exits/ entrances to check the child does not leave the premises.
- If the child is not found after an agreed time contact the police.

How to implement your Safe Child Scheme

Make sure all the parties involved in the Safe Child Scheme are aware of the actions expected of them. It is crucial that all the staff know about the Safe Child Scheme, how it operates in their shop or other venues and the steps they should take.

Staff training

Staff training is imperative to the success of Safe Child Schemes. All staff need to be aware of the step-by-step operation of a Safe Child Scheme particularly their role to ensure the safety of the lost child. It is not sufficient to rely on common sense alone as staff may quite unwittingly place a child in their care in a potentially dangerous situation unless they follow the agreed procedures. Training needs to be maintained to ensure new staff are informed and existing staff do not forget.

There are a number of different approaches to training staff:

- Using existing in-house trainers to ensure the Safe Child Scheme is incorporated into induction training for all staff, with up-dates and refresher sessions from time to time. This will be more appropriate for larger retailers and organisations. The trainers can be given information packs including training aids eg, video, for this purpose.
- Representatives from a shop or business may attend locally organised training sessions and ensure other staff in their organisation learn about the scheme, introducing an element of cascade learning. This may be more appropriate to smaller shops where there are fewer staff.
- Staff may be given written information about the Safe Child Scheme and the steps they should follow. This will be best used to reinforce previous training.

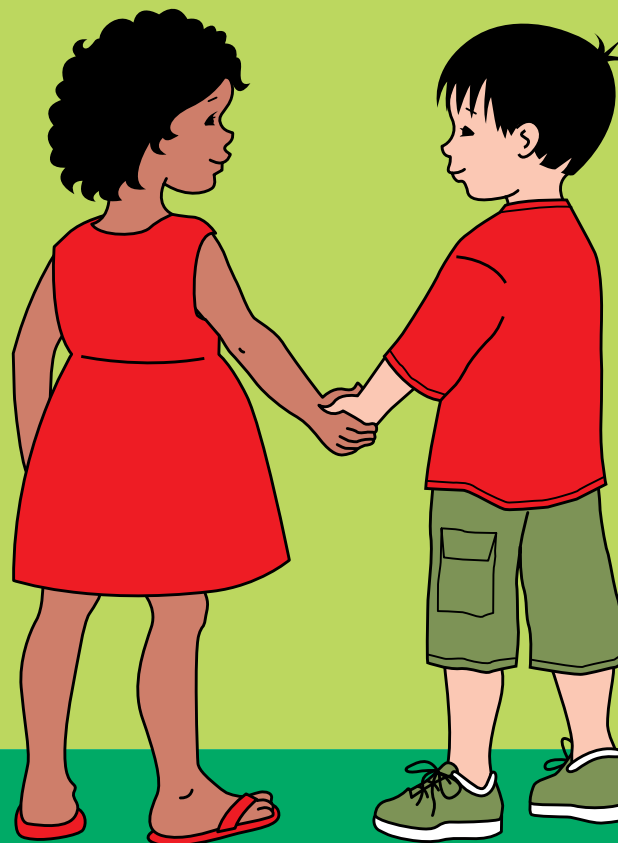
How to promote your Safe Child Scheme

When setting up a Safe Child Scheme the organisers need to consider how best to ensure as many people as possible know about the Scheme and the basic way it operates. For example, families visiting from another area are unlikely to be aware that the Scheme is operating. Children may be with adults who are not their parents, such as grandparents or other relatives or friends or carers. How will they know about the Scheme?

How to inform children

- Local community police officers can include Safe Child Scheme information when visiting and giving talks to children at primary schools, nurseries, playgroups, toddler groups and clubs.
- Leaflets, posters and other publicity material can be given to the above and teachers may tell children about the Safe Child Scheme or reinforce information given by the police.
- Some retailers may invite visits from schools and can publicise the Safe Child Scheme on these visits.
- Shopping centres can hold special events or exhibitions to publicise the Safe Child Scheme.

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- Parents can be asked to tell their children about the Safe Child Scheme, encouraging them to look out for the Safe Child Scheme logo when out shopping.
- Information on the Safe Child Scheme should be available from the information desk at a shopping centre.
- A competition can be organised inviting children to explore the Scheme eg. by drawing a safe child or entering a colouring competition.

How to inform parents

- Parents may be informed about the Safe Child Scheme through their child's school or nursery either by being invited to attend a talk or given leaflets.
- Shopping centres and other venues can advertise the Safe Child Scheme and give out leaflets explaining the Scheme from information desks and have in-store promotion using posters, stickers and leaflets.

Sometimes a member of the public will be the first person to see a young child on their own, perhaps in distress. Schemes work well where all members of the public are aware of the Scheme and take responsibility for the welfare of children.

These are some suggestions for general publicity about the Scheme:

- The holding hands logo acts as a reminder that the Scheme is in operation in the area.
- Leaflets and posters in shops or customer service desks in shopping centres give details of how the Safe Child Scheme operates.
- Local radio, television broadcasts and newspapers will cover newsworthy stories about Safe Child Schemes.
- Displays and events can be used to launch schemes or revitalise existing schemes.
- Children should be encouraged to engage in learning about the Safe Child Scheme eg. drawing competitions, quizzes or treasure hunts arranged by the shopping centre.



How to monitor the success of your Safe Child Scheme

Local schemes should be monitored and evaluated to ensure procedures are working and standards of care are met. This needs to be relatively informal so that staff do not feel burdened by the Scheme.

Areas to monitor include:

- Training – are staff continually being informed about the Safe Child Scheme procedures?
- Communication systems – are they working and being used effectively to enable children to be reunited with their parents as quickly as possible?
- Monitoring success – how many children have been separated and reunited during set periods? Are there patterns to this?
- Assessing if there are particular areas where children get lost, perhaps

because of the layout of the store, height of shelf units/racks or because of the nature of an event.

- Understanding if there are any problems eg. parents not informing staff when they are reunited with their children.

Local schemes will need to agree the level of monitoring where membership of the Scheme is conferred by some form of registration. This might include spot checks, repeat training as well as the recording of incidents. A suggested review period of 12 months provides opportunities to see progress and fine tune any issues that arise.

How to sustain interest in your Safe Child Scheme

One of the problems experienced by some local schemes is that interest wanes after the initial period following the launch. This can have a major impact as the level of awareness of the Scheme declines.

Various approaches to this are being developed:

- an annual registration of all the businesses involved
- regular re-launches with publicity about the success of the Scheme
- media stories with personal testimonies.

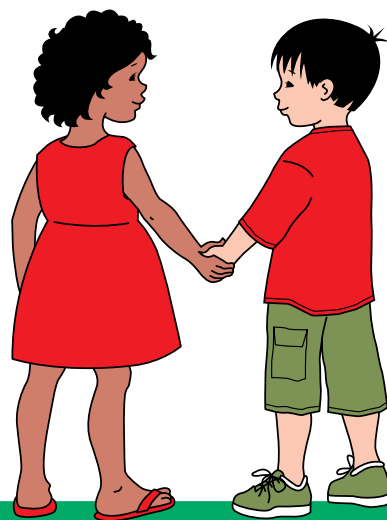
How to get the most from your **Safe Child Scheme**

Simple ways to ensure you get the most from the **Safe Child Scheme** include:

- having one organisation taking the lead in the initial set up of the Scheme
- securing commitment from partners and keeping them informed – remember the Safe Child Scheme works best as a community response
- creating an implementation plan with the partners
- developing appropriate guidelines for your local area
- considering how parents, carers and others in the area need to be informed about the Scheme – what publicity, leaflets etc are needed?
- keeping children informed through talks in local schools and nurseries from community police officers
- developing a training programme for all staff so that they are aware of how to act when a child becomes lost
- having a high-profile launch that can help to create interest and knowledge about a local scheme
- ensuring that publicity about the Scheme continues after the launch.

To help sustain **Safe Child Schemes**, try to:

- develop a programme to update training
- consider an annual re-launch or publicity drive
- keep everyone informed of the good news
- involve children and parents in activities in-store to promote the Scheme
- encourage feedback from everyone involved and publicise the successes you experience as widely as possible.



Showing the **Safe Child Scheme** video

This booklet has been primarily written to accompany the video *Safe Child Schemes – a guide to getting started*.

The video has been designed to cater for different audiences. It can either be shown in its entirety (15 minutes) or in sections.

Section one

Provides a general introduction and is aimed at a predominantly adult audience and gives information for both parents and Scheme members. The section outlines the need for, and the benefits of, the Safe Child Scheme and highlights the distress caused when parents become separated from their children.

Section two

Provides a short overview of the important considerations that Scheme members and staff should take when helping a child who is lost or separated from their parent or carer. This is illustrated with reconstructions.

Section three

Aimed at children under the age of seven. The section presents the Safe Child Scheme from a child's point of view and is especially useful for work in schools and nurseries.

Section four

Contains tips for police officers and teachers on how to work with groups of children in schools and nurseries on safety in public places.

About the **NSPCC**

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

The NSPCC's mission is to end cruelty to children. The NSPCC FULL STOP Campaign was launched in March 1999. FULL STOP incorporates a number of innovative projects and initiatives. Many of these are managed directly by the NSPCC; many others are being implemented in partnership with other organisations and agencies.

Through public and professional education and awareness, campaigning and lobbying, we aim to achieve a fundamental shift in values, attitudes and behaviour towards children and young people, so that they are genuinely valued. The NSPCC is looking at the practical steps businesses can take to ensure children's welfare and safety.

Why is the NSPCC involved with Safe Child Schemes?

The NSPCC is working to make communities safe and stimulating places for children and their families.

The Safe Child Scheme is one way to raise awareness of children's needs and to encourage action to protect children and promote their well-being.

The NSPCC believes that the Safe Child Scheme is an important way for organisations to both recognise their responsibility and take action to protect children.

For further copies of this booklet and accompanying video, please contact:

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