Help! I’ve Lost My Child....

Families offers tips on how to guard against this.

No words can describe the panic that a parent feels when their child disappears from sight in a crowded place. It can happen in a heartbeat and, if it’s happened to you, you’ll recall the terrifying sensation exactly. At airports, stations, leisure attractions, museums and beaches, crowds can go with the territory and mean it’s more difficult spotting your child if you get separated.

So here’s some things you can do to help:

Bright Clothing
Dress your children brightly - those dressed in colourful, bright clothing do to help:

- Dress your children brightly - if you get separated.
- Help a child learn their name and address and your name and phone number, so that they can provide the details to an authoritative person. If they’re very young, try teaching them your number through rhyme or learning by rote and repetition.
- Consider ID Cards or Tagging: Safety ID cards with essential information can be attached to bags and clothes worn around the neck with a lanyard. For waterproofing, you can buy small capsule-like containers worn like a necklace. You can also now obtain quite powerful, wearable GPS trackers for kids.
- Baby and Toddler Harnesses: Even if you don’t like seeing little ones constrained, sometimes the security offered by reins and harnesses can help you all relax. These days you can buy really cute reins attached to furry belts and backpacks that your little one will be happy to wear.

Stay Calm
If your child disappears, try to stay calm (easier said than done!). You’ll be able to think and communicate more clearly, helping you and others find your child quickly.

Call 999
The police advise calling 999 and reporting a child missing as soon as you have concerns for their safety.

More info. visit www.safekids.co.uk

My Teenager Won’t Talk to Me?

By Dr John Coleman

Parents and teenagers need to be able to talk together. Yet in so many families this turns out to be a major challenge. Parents feel their teenager won’t listen, and teenagers feel exactly the same: that their parents aren’t listening.

One 14-year-old girl put it like this: “My parents expect me to tell them everything, but how can I when all they do is nag? Why haven’t you done this? Why haven’t you done that? That’s all they say.”

Why does this breakdown in communication occur?

Parents have the sense that their young person really prefers to talk to friends or communicate via social media. They feel that they, as parents, don’t matter anymore. They feel rejected and pushed aside. They feel that their young person no longer has any respect for their opinions. Naturally, this is hard to take. On the other hand, teenagers feel that they are being treated as children. They feel their parents do not want a conversation but to dig for information or tell them what to do.

It is not surprising that these misunderstandings lead to a situation where both sides feel irritated and frustrated with each other. So what can be done? Before trying to address the situation, remember:

- Timing is critical: Your teenager won’t always talk at the time that is best for you.
- Your teenager won’t talk about the things he/she considers to be private.
- Interrogation doesn’t work: Your teenager won’t talk if he or she thinks the conversation is going to turn into one.
- Your teenager won’t talk if he or she feels you are busy, distracted or likely to be interrupted.

Despite the above, teenagers DO want to talk to their parents. So how can they learn to talk to each other?

It’s helpful to understand some of the aspects of teenage life that have an impact on communication. Firstly, there are times when teenagers feel that they need to be in control of communication. They will talk, but in their own time, and in a way that feels safe for them. This is partly to do with lack of confidence, but also to do with confusing emotions. Both these factors mean that it is not always easy to talk openly at any point. This means that parents will have more success in conversation with their teenager if they talk in a manner that makes their young person feel their views are respected. Good communication has to be a two-way street and talking and listening go hand in hand.

Secondly, it is important to recognise that during the teenage years, young people do need a degree of privacy to sort things out and work through them for themselves. They are striving to be independent individuals, taking decisions for themselves, rather than talking things through with their parents all the time.

Finally, we have begun to recognise just how much change is taking place in the brain of our young people during the teenage years. The brain is maturing and undergoing radical transition. It’s not easy for young people to adjust to such major change. As a result there are bound to be times when they struggle to behave in a grown-up and sensible manner.

However, parents DO still matter to teenagers – hugely – and have a key role to play. They provide the endorsement, love and structure that makes a young person feel safe and secure. Without them, your teenager would be lost.

However, you now have a different role from the one you had before. If you can step back and think about their needs, communication will improve. If you can listen, your teenager will talk.

Dr John Coleman trained as a clinical psychologist, and was formerly a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. He is the Founder of a research centre studying adolescents and their families. His book Why Won’t My Teenager Talk to Me? (Routledge RRP £15.99) is available from Amazon.