

# What Parents Need to Know

Personnel in healthcare facilities should remind **parents**, in a warm and comforting way, of the measures they should take to provide maximum child protection. The guidelines listed below provide good, sound parenting techniques that can also help prevent abduction of infants while in the healthcare facility where the baby was born and once the parents take the baby home. They should be shared with expectant parents at prenatal visits, during the tour of the facility pre-delivery, and during the parents stay at the time of birth.

Please note that in many cases of infant abduction, the abductor was bilingual while the victim mother was not. Healthcare facilities need to provide multilingual-educational information to these parents because infants' risk levels of abduction are substantially elevated when parents are not properly educated in their native language about the safety issues involved. The Spanish-language version of these prevention tips is also available, and healthcare facilities should consider translating these tips into any other languages used by patients in their service area.

## FACILITY 1.

At some point **before** the birth of your baby, investigate security procedures at the facility where you plan to give birth to your baby and request a copy of the facility's written guidelines on procedures for "special care" and security procedures in the maternity ward. Know all of the facility's procedures that are in place to safeguard your infant while staying in that facility.

## FACILITY 2.

While it is normal for new parents to be anxious, being deliberately watchful over the newborn infant is of paramount importance.

## FACILITY 3.

Never leave your infant 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 the infant back to the nursery or have a family member watch the baby. When possible, keep the infant's bassinet on the side of your bed that is away from the door(s) leading out of the room.

## FACILITY 4.

After admission to the facility, ask about the facility's protocols concerning the routine nursery procedures, feeding and visitation hours, and security measures. Do not hesitate to politely ask direct questions and settle for nothing less than an acceptable explanation.

## FACILITY 5.

Do not give your infant 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 the infant. Speak to a person in authority, such as a unit director or charge nurse, if you have any questions or concerns.

## **FACILITY 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 you and your infant.

## **FACILITY 7.**

Question unfamiliar persons entering your room or inquiring about your infant—even if they are in the facility's attire or seem to have a reason for being there. Alert the nurses' station immediately.

## **FACILITY 8.**

Determine where your infant will be when taken for tests, and how long the tests will take. Find out who has authorized the tests. If you are uncomfortable with anyone who requests to take your infant or unable to clarify what testing is being done or why your infant is being taken from your room, it is appropriate to go with your infant to observe the procedure. Or if you are unable to accompany your infant, have a family member go along.

## **FACILITY 9.**

For your records to take home, have at least one color photograph of your infant (full, front-face view) taken along with footprints and compile a complete written description of your infant including hair and eye color, length, weight, date of birth, and specific physical characteristics.

## **FACILITY/HOME 10.**

At some point **after** the birth of your baby, but **before** discharge from the facility, request a set of written guidelines on the procedures for any follow-up care extended by the facility that will be scheduled to take place in your home. Do not allow anyone into your home who says that 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.

## **FACILITY/HOME 11.**

Consider the risk you may be taking when permitting your infant'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.

## **HOME 12.**

The use of outdoor decorations to announce the infant's arrival such as balloons, large floral wreaths, wooden storks, and other lawn ornaments are not recommended because they call attention to the presence of a new infant in the home.

## **HOME 13.**

Only allow persons 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 infant. There have been several cases where an abductor has made initial contact with a mother and infant in the healthcare-facility setting and then subsequently abducted the infant from the family home. If anyone should arrive at the home claiming to be affiliated with the healthcare facility where the infant was born or other healthcare provider, remember to follow the procedures outlined in number 10 above. A high degree of diligence should be exercised by family members when home with the infant. The bottom line is, the infant's family **is** the domestic security team, and all family members should be sensitive to any suspicious visitors.

In addition there have been cases in which initial contact with a mother and infant was made in other settings such as shopping malls or bus stations. If you must take your infant 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 the infant. **Never** leave a child alone in a motor vehicle. Always take the child with you. Never let someone you don't know pick up or hold your child.

These tips are excerpted from *For Healthcare Professionals: Guidelines on Prevention of and Response to Infant Abductions*.

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