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Avoiding stranger abductions

LIBERTY, Mo. – Though stranger abductions are rare Clay County Prosecuting Attorney Daniel White says events July 4th at Worlds of Fun show not all predators troll for victims on the Internet.

Jonathan S. Stell, 43, of Seminary, MS, is being held in the Clay County Jail in lieu of \$350,000 on charges of attempted abduction of a 6-year-old girl at the popular theme park Tuesday. He was arraigned Thursday, entered a plea of not guilty, and saw his case continued to a docket call 9 a.m. July 18 in Division Seven of Clay County Circuit Court. White stressed though charged, Stell is presumed innocent unless there is a plea or finding of guilty.

“We spend a lot of time letting our children know about Internet dangers but the old-fashioned predators are still out there,” said White.

“When such events occur, children come to parents with questions about what happened and if it could it happen to them. This gives a parent an opportunity to sit down with children and talk about safety in a non-frightening way,” said White.

White said that this 6-year-old child “did everything right.”

“She made noise, kicked and screamed and struggled and got away. Because of her effort, the defendant was quickly apprehended and no one was injured,” said White.

White urged parents to talk to their children about the dangers a stranger may pose.

“Every parent warns children to stay aware of strangers but we need to make sure the kids know just who a stranger is: It’s someone you do not know. No matter how kind, caring or ‘normal’ someone looks, if you don’t know that person, he or she is a stranger.

“Let the youngster know you as a parent do a lot of things for the child’s safety, and this talk about strangers is just another thing you do. Compare it to car safety seats, smoke detectors and holding the child’s hand while looking both ways before crossing a street. This talk is just another component of safety,” said White.

When having the stranger talk with youngsters, put it in that context, said White. “Parents don’t want to unduly alarm their kids but on the other hand, they do want them to know what to do if approached,” said the prosecutor.

White suggests parents:

- Make sure the child knows his name, his parents’ names, and his address and telephone number. Knowing grandparents’ or another trusted adult’s name and telephone number is also a good idea. Also teach him how to use 911.
- Urge the child to be vigilant. “Pattern the behavior you want your child to follow. Have your keys in your hand when you’re going to the car. Pay attention to what’s going on around you. Show your child she, too, can help by being watchful and alert. Have her point things out to you to show she’s paying attention to what’s going on around her.”

- Let the children know “bad guys don’t play fair.” “They don’t announce ‘Hi, I’ll be your stalker today,’” says White. “Theirs is predatory behavior. They try to take would-be victims by surprise. They may pretend to be something they’re not, or may use force. Whatever they do will be designed to shock and frighten the would-be target into compliance,” said White. “Let youngsters know tricks a crook might use.”
- Inform the child rules are “out the window” if a stranger approaches, or grabs or tries to grab the child. “Tell her to make as much noise as possible. Scream. Swear. Use all those bad words she’s not supposed to use at the top of her lungs. Yell ‘He’s not my father!’ Break things. Kick. Tell her that if she can’t kick him, knock over a display or a garbage can or anything else handy. Bite hard. Throw things. Grab doors or windows and don’t let go. Dump trash cans. Make a scene and slow the guy down. Let the child know if she ever finds herself in danger, rules are gone. Be rude. Be loud. Break stuff; anything goes,” said White.
- Finally, White urges parents to be aware of youngsters as they’re growing and changing. “Don’t get too worked up or paranoid about all this but take a moment just to think about what your child wears. Regularly record your child’s height and weight, and take pictures. If something awful were to happen, having photos and accurate information readily available makes it much easier for police to distribute,” said the prosecutor

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