

PRESS RELEASE, 28 APRIL 2021

CHARITY CALLS ON LONDON TEACHERS AND PARENTS TO TEACH CHILDREN 'CLEVER NEVER GOES' FOLLOWING ATTEMPTED CHILD ABDUCTION IN CLAPHAM

Following reports of an attempted abduction of a 6 year-old boy in Clapham last week the charity Action Against Abduction is calling on schools and parents to turn to the 'Clever Never Goes' message to keep children safe.

Clever Never Goes has been designed to replace the out-dated and in-effective 'stranger danger' approach. Most strangers will not harm children, and many people that do pose a risk to children are not strangers. Clever Never Goes is based on the simple message that children shouldn't go with anyone unless it has been arranged beforehand.

Geoff Newiss, Director of the Clever Never Goes campaign, said "Whilst in this particular case the suspect may indeed be a stranger, it's important to recognise the real drawbacks of persisting with the 'stranger danger' message. Apart from the fact that most strangers are not a threat, there's a mountain of evidence that young children struggle to understand exactly who is and who isn't a stranger. It's better to help children to recognise a dangerous situation, such as being asked to go somewhere, rather than attempting to distinguish between dangerous and non-dangerous people."

The latest figures collected by the charity show that in 2019/20 the Metropolitan Police Service recorded 61 non-parental child abductions and 125 child kidnappings. However, it is important to stress that these include a broad range of offences including cases of grooming and exploitation, and offenders both known to the victim and strangers. The majority of stranger-perpetrated offences are attempted abductions rather than cases in which a child was actually taken.

To date, more than 100 schools across London have signed up to the Clever Never Goes programme (more than 1,400 across the whole of the UK). Clever Never Goes is endorsed by the Metropolitan Police Service.

Newiss continues "The whole ethos of Clever Never Goes is to give children the skills to recognise and respond to those rare occasions when they might be in danger. It's about moving away from the fear that comes with stranger danger. As children get older and are given more independence, for example to walk to school on their own, we need to be giving them confidence to interact safely with their surroundings, rather than terrifying them about the possible threat from all people they don't know."

The Clever Never Goes programme consists of a primary school lesson plan and teaching aides which can be downloaded (for free) at www.clevernevergoes.org. Parents and carers can download a Home Pack with information and activities at the same website. The programme features a child-friendly robot (called 'CLEVER') who helps children to refine their key 'Go Spotting' safety skills.

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For interviews: please contact Geoff Newiss (Director, Action Against Abduction) 0777 6252 034; geoffnewiss@actionagainstabduction.org

Notes for Editors:

Clever Never Goes resources

Schools can sign up to receive free Clever Never Goes resources at www.clevernevergoes.org. The Schools Pack consists of teacher's guidance pack with two lesson plans and activities for Key Stage 1 and early Key Stage 2 children; a set of classroom slides; and a series of short 'Go Spotting' practice films. These films feature different interactions between children and adults (some safe and some un-safe) giving children chance to practice 'Go Spotting' (spotting when someone is asking a child to go with them), and teachers the chance to make sure their pupils have understood the Clever Never Goes message.

In addition, a Home Pack and 'Go Spotting' comic strips are available for parents and carers to talk to their children about the Clever Never Goes approach.

Pilot

The Clever Never Goes programme was piloted in seven schools, involving over 300 children of mixed ages and abilities. Measures of children's ability to recognise an unsafe situation rose from 60 to 90 per cent after the first lesson. The pilot report is available at: clevernevergoes.org/key-reports/

'Stranger danger'

In 2014 Action Against Abduction published a review of 'stranger danger' highlighting the inherent difficulties with the approach; see 'Beyond Stranger Danger': clevernevergoes.org/key-reports/. The four main problems with 'stranger danger' are:

- Focusing attention on the threat from strangers can detract from the greater danger posed by someone known to children.
- Teaching children to be wary of strangers can inhibit them from seeking help if they are lost or in distress.
- Psychological studies have demonstrated that children of all ages struggle to distinguish a stranger from a non-stranger. Young children often think 'nice-looking' or 'kind-sounding' people are not strangers. Conversely, strangers are often perceived to all be 'mean-looking'.
- Adults are often not consistent in applying rules not to talk to, or take things from, strangers.

Despite this, a report by the Children's Commissioner in 2017, found that 90% of primary schools were still delivering 'stranger danger' classes; see [Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: The Role of Schools](#) (page 11).

BBC "People Fixing the World"

In 2018 Clever Never Goes was featured in the BBC World Service series "People Fixing the World", an online series profiling 'brilliant solutions to the world's problems': [Time to update the Stranger Danger message](#).

Images available:



Clever Never Goes logo



Logo and background



Clever Never Goes in the classroom



Child walking to school