

Bobby and Mande's Too Safe for Strangers: Children's Safety Book

Robert Kahn

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Bobby and Mande's Too Safe for Strangers is a picture book in which children deliver a public safety message for their peers.

DARE instructor and deputy sheriff Robert Kahn's educational picture book *Bobby and Mande's Too Safe for Strangers* introduces stranger danger using common scenarios; it delivers advice for children too.

In this matter-of-fact book, Bobby and Mande explain the concept of strangers (anyone, of any age or gender, who is unknown to a person). They assert that, though children are brought up to be respectful of adults, they are not obligated to be so in every situation. Their straightforward examples include a man asking for help with finding his lost dog and a person offering candy and a ride in a car. These are used to explain warning signs and to introduce tactics for responding, including running away and screaming for help.

Key concepts appear in capital letters, and the book's language is clear and uncluttered. Still, the approach to the topic is quite spare. The book avoids direct mentions of abduction, molestation, and other crimes, favoring vague references to the harms that "bad strangers" using "bad tricks" can inflict. Such omissions require the additional guidance of an adult familiar with each audience member's maturity level.

The cartoon illustrations depict Bobby and Mande together with their family and in imagined scenarios. They encounter a sunny variety of people, including a man in a business suit. The suggestion is that strangers come in every guise and social class. The settings range from sidewalks to grassy parks, all rendered in a crisp format.

The book induces guidance on the responsible use of 911 and review questions to reinforce its ideas. Still, while the book represents a useful first step for broaching safety concepts, its narrow focus on absolute strangers means that its safety recommendations are limited. Gray areas remain, and uncomfortable situations with people who children know well are omitted in defiance of statistics. Further, the book's neighborhood ambiance dates it: there is no treatment of how stranger danger plays out while children are online.

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KAREN RIGBY (February 14, 2023)

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