



**KEEPING OUR CHILDREN SAFE**  
**-A GUIDE FOR PARENTS**





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## About Rozan

Rozan's mission is to have worked with all people, especially women, youth and children, to collectively strive for a society that is violence free, self aware and accepting of itself and others. It is Rozan's belief that emotional health is an essential pre-requisite to individual development.

Rozan works through three main strategies:

- Raising awareness
- Providing emotional support
- Capacity-building

### **Zeest**

Rozan's women's program works on the emotional health of women focusing on issues of gender and violence against women.

### **Youth help line**

A toll free telephonic counseling service provides the youth an avenue where they can seek, with complete confidentiality, free information, counseling, guidance and emotional support, regarding issues and concerns associated with their emotional and reproductive health.

### **Rabta**

Rozan's police training program works to enhance the relationship between the police and community by providing opportunities for positive interaction and by sensitizing the police force to self-growth, gender and violence against women and children.

### **Munsalik**

Rozan's project that works with the media to address social crimes, such as violence against women and children by involving journalists as advocates for change.

### **Humqadam**

Humqadam was initiated in November 2008 and is working with boys and men on the issue of gender - based violence. It also works with young boys and through awareness raising campaigns and material development in an effort to mobilize them on gender based violence. The project also conducts research on masculinities.

### **Aangan**

Rozan's children's program works on the emotional and mental health of children in general, and on child sexual abuse in particular. It specifically targets those adults, professionals and institutions that influence children, such as doctors, teachers, parents, child rights organizations and child related institutions. Aangan has successfully introduced a life skills curriculum in selected schools of Islamabad and also serves as a resource and training centre on the sensitive issue of child sexual abuse. It disseminates information through its publications, print and electronic media and also provides counseling to survivors of child sexual abuse through letters, telephone and in person counseling. It also arranges counseling camps in different communities and schools.



## Why a booklet for parents?

As a parent, nothing could be more important to you than your children's safety and wellbeing. But no matter "how careful you are," you cannot always be there physically to protect your children from all the dangers of the world. As children grow older, it is natural, normal and even good for them to be without you sometimes, and in most situations, children are safe. But not always. Even the most clever, mature and sensible children are still children and can therefore be taken advantage of by older people who wish to do so. As parents, it is your right and responsibility to find ways of keeping your children safe even when you are not around them. This parent guide can help you find such ways by providing you with valuable information and ideas on safety and on communicating with your children and teenagers on self-protection.

According to our law, any person under the age of 18 years is considered a child.



# What kind of dangers can your children face?

## Children (primary school)

- **Bullying at school or in other settings**

Children may be constantly teased, harassed, picked on or even physically hurt by older or stronger children at school or where they play. Often, they do not tell their parents about this because they may not be confident enough, are too embarrassed or because they may have been threatened by the bully. Bullies know this and take advantage of it. As a result, children may face serious bullying at school or in the playground for years without their parents knowing.

- **Exposure to inappropriate situations**

Often children accompany older adults or older siblings to places where they see or experience things that are not appropriate for their age and may even be harmful. Examples are places where adult movies are being watched or where there are drugs, alcohol or violence.

- **Child sexual abuse**

A special kind of danger that children may face is called child sexual abuse. A child is a victim of sexual abuse when a much older child or adult uses a child sexually. This includes sexual touching, showing children adult sexual activity or sexual movies/videos/e-mail/photographs; making children undress or perform in a sexual way, watching/spying on a child sexually, and even rape. Girls and boys of all ages may be forced or manipulated into such situations, which is easy because they are only children and do not fully understand what any of this means. Sexual abuse usually happens in secret when the abuser thinks no one around them can find out what is happening, that he/she will not be caught and that the child will be too confused or scared to refuse or tell anyone later.

- **Abduction and trafficking**

Children may be abducted from where they live and taken to other towns where they are forced to do work, such as begging, working in factories or even prostitution. Not only are these children separated from their families and taken out of school, but they are further exposed to extremely dangerous situations in which they may be severely harmed even more. Abduction occurs



market place, groups or gangs (political, ethnic, religious, tribal, etc) who may try and tempt young boys with exciting or daring activities, offers of money, a better life or making them believe it is for a good cause.

Youngsters like to feel they are now 'grown-up', that they can take daring risks, that they are doing something for an important cause or that they belong to a group. This is how many of them become involved and then trapped. In disruptive and chaotic situations – such as soon after a disaster, in the midst of a community conflict or displaced situation – children and teenagers are even more vulnerable as families are often distressed and occupied with basic logistical activities. Living places are disrupted, family members may be separated and security is generally low. Many children and teenagers are left unattended at such times and are an easy target for people who want to take advantage of them. Crimes such as child abduction, trafficking, sexual abuse, etc., increase in such situations.



## How would we know our child might be in danger?

### Children (Primary school)

- Sudden, unexplained change in behaviour and/or mood
- Sudden, unexplained drop in school performance
- Too much whining or crying without any reason
- Sudden, unexplained eating or sleeping problems
- Constant complaints of aches and pains without a reason
- Excessive interest in, and awareness of, violent or sexual activities, play or aggression
- Unexplained injuries, especially if they occur more than once (unexplained genital irritation or injuries may indicate sexual abuse)
- Unexplained and excessive time outside the home
- Unexplained and excessive time alone with one or two much older children or adults
- Fear or discomfort in relation to a particular older child or adult or to certain places
- Frequent bed-wetting (after toilet training)
- Unexplained, unnecessary or excessive gifts/money from an older child or adult
- Child tells you about a specific dangerous situation

### Teenagers

- Sudden and unexplained change in mood and/or behaviour, including mood swings
- Depression
- Unexplained fears of certain places and people
- Violent behaviour
- Sudden, unexplained drop in school performance
- Sudden and excessive change in eating and sleeping patterns
- Self-harming behaviour, including suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Lying a lot/stealing/running away from home
- Unexplained and/or excessive time with a particular older child or adult



- Unexplained injuries
- Long disappearances/unexplained and excessive time outside the home
- Unexplained, unnecessary or excessive gifts/money from an older child or adult
- Teenager tells you about a specific dangerous situation

**Note:** The above behaviours do not necessarily mean that the child or teenager is in danger, but they should alert the caretakers/guardians to some anxiety in her/his life, which may or may not be a dangerous situation.



## What can we do to protect our children and teenagers?

### Be aware and alert

Make an effort to gain more information on the situation around your living spaces, knowing where your children are, who they are with, what their company is like, etc. This does not mean you need to constantly be with your children or check on them all the time - it simply means being generally attentive and observant of what is happening around your children, their moods and behaviours, others' behaviours towards them, etc. This allows parents to pick up on any changes, strange behaviours and signs.

Young children are, of course, easier to supervise than teenagers. But teenagers, both boys and girls, also need to be taught that the adults at home are in charge and have a right to know where they are, who they are with, when they will be back, etc.

### Be involved

Being involved in a caring way, but without being too interfering is the best way of being aware of what is going on around your child. This will allow you to develop a relationship with them and to pick up signs of anxiety and danger and to notice troubling relationships with older children or adults. It also allows children to feel more comfortable about talking to you if something is going wrong. Parents can be involved by spending quality time with their children, chatting with them, discussing issues, showing an interest in opinions, activities, likes, dislikes, giving advice, etc.

Equally important is to be involved with the people, groups and institutions your children are a part of. Know about the schools/hostels/madrassas your children go to, make sure you have access to your children and to appropriate authorities at all times, and let authorities know that you are watching. Similarly, any older people your children spend time with (e.g, home tutors, teachers, relatives) also need to know that you are involved, alert, and watching, and that if there is any reason for concern, you will act.

Being involved with your teenagers' lives can be a challenge! It is natural for them to want to spend some time alone. But even here, you can take out time to get to know them by discussing issues with them and showing an interest in their activities in a friendly and supportive way without being over-restrictive. One reason



children and teenagers avoid telling their parents about their problems and anxieties is fear of what their parents' response might be. Children are much more likely to turn to their parents for help if they already have a friendly and supportive relationship.

It is important to note that being aware, alert and involved does NOT mean worrying about your children all the time! Nor does it mean keeping a constant check on them or being over-protective, over-restrictive or controlling about everything they do. It means being alert to signs of trouble and communicating with them so you know the important things and so they can turn to you in times of doubt or confusion.

### **Give your children proper information**

Just as you give your children advice about their safety, their studies, friends, etc all the time, you can also tell them about the dangers around them and what to do if they are ever in a vulnerable situation. The younger the child, the more responsible parents are for his or her safety, but as they get older, they need more information to protect themselves. One never knows when the child might be in a dangerous situation, so the earlier such things are discussed, the better it is. Even very young children can be given useful information. The point is not to scare children or to make them nervous and mistrusting of everyone. The idea simply is to increase their awareness, confidence, skills and trust in you. And this information needs to be repeated from time to time, so that it stays with your children.

### **What your children need to know is:**

#### **What kind of dangers might be out there**

- Children need to be aware of their surroundings. For example, in a disaster situation, tell your children that there are people who are out there who will try and take advantage of them because of the disorganisation and lack of security around them.
- Tell children that while most people around them may be genuinely good and caring people, they cannot blindly and automatically trust everyone just because they are adults or in a respectable position.
- Tell children to be alert to the methods that a potential perpetrator may use to try and manipulate them, e.g., threats, offers, gifts, promises, time alone without a reason, asking them to keep their meeting a secret from everyone, etc.
- Warn your children that they also need to be careful on the



internet and mobile phones about people who might try and harm them

## **What to do if they sense danger**

Teach your children realistic and specific ways of responding to situations where they sense danger. Most perpetrators try and harm children in secret, away from the eyes of people who might object, so one of the most important and immediate things you can teach your children is that secrets that make them feel uncomfortable and scared are NOT OK. Discuss ways of making an uncomfortable situation public if it is possible to do so without creating further danger. Saying 'No' to the person, moving/running away from the place to a more public space or to someone you trust and who can help you immediately (e.g., school principal, camp management or even the police if needed), avoiding being alone with the person, screaming, yelling for help, etc., are some options.

A critically important message you need to give your children is that no one has the right to harm them, even if they are adults they know and who are in a position of authority. Tell them that it is ok to disobey adults in such situations, and to then tell someone about them.

With teenagers, such issues can be discussed openly. Your teenager might already have heard about many of the issues you talk about and have ideas of his or her own. With little children, it may be more useful to make this a fun activity rather than a serious discussion. One way of doing this is by presenting scenarios, such as 'what would you do if...?' to them and then discussing possible answers.

## **Who to go to**

Children and teenagers are often afraid of adults. You can help them identify adults they can turn to without fearing them, especially at a time of immediate need. Encourage your children to develop a list of adults they trust, have a good relationship with and who are easily accessible, such as a family member, particularly an older cousin, a teacher, a relative, an aunty, a neighbor, a family friend, etc. Talk to them about the importance of going to an adult for help, emphasizing that if they ever sense an immediate danger, they should go to whoever is closest and available. With little children, it is also important to ensure they know their full names (including parents' names), addresses, numbers, names of their villages/towns/cities and surrounding areas.

## **You, their parents, are their best support**

No one can protect and support your children like you can. It is great if your children can put together a list of trusted adults as suggested



above, but ultimately, your children have to feel comfortable enough to turn to you in times of need. But this is not an automatic choice for many children. Sometimes children fear their parents too much to tell them when there is a problem. You can avoid and change this by assuring your children that no matter what, they can always come to you if they sense any kind of harm or danger and that you will support them. Building a supportive, friendly relationship with your children helps make the parent-child gap smaller and increases mutual trust.

And if and when your children do come and tell you about a danger or potential danger in their lives, be sure to be supportive and encouraging. Blaming your children, screaming and shouting, not believing them, etc., are harmful responses, most likely ensuring that your children will not turn to you again. Here are some helpful things you can SAY to your children or teenagers if they tell you about a difficulty/harm/danger they may be facing or have faced in the past:

- You did the right thing by telling me.
- I believe you.
- I'm sorry this is happening/has happened to you.
- It's not your fault.
- I will take care of you.
- All your feelings are normal and understandable.
- You can always come and talk to me when you want.

Some things you can DO to support your children:

- Encourage them to talk about it and express their thoughts and feelings, whenever they can and want.
- Ensure your children are safe from the person/people who are harming/trying to harm them.
- Seek professional advice and support.
- Do not get too emotional and upset.
- Give your children extra attention for a while till they are feeling better and more secure.
- Seek support if you are feeling too upset – you can support your children better if you are feeling OK yourself.
- Contact Aangan or other organisations for advice or help if you need to.





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