

Advice around personal safety in public

We have recently seen some incidents where suspicious individuals have been reported approaching school students in public. Some of these reports have been found to not be suspicious, but others remain concerning.

With this in mind, it is timely to provide some advice to students who are walking to or from school, or in public areas at other times. With all of this considered though, we still live in one of the safest countries in the world, and we still want our young people to be able to walk freely to and from school without undue concern.

Advice for young people when walking in public places:

- 1) Walk in areas where other people are also present - avoid taking shortcuts through secluded areas.
- 2) If at all possible, walk with a buddy or in a group.
- 3) Avoid distractions such as listening to music or texting when walking - instead pay attention to your surroundings.
- 4) If you think you are being followed, walk quickly straight ahead. Consider crossing the road to see if the person also follows. If this happens, run to a shop or up to an adult and ask for help.
- 5) If you are approached by someone offering you treats, or asking you to come with them, ignore them and quickly move away.
- 6) If someone grabs you, yell out "Go away!!" at the top of your voice so as to attract attention to the situation. Push the person away with all of your strength.
- 7) If someone starts talking to you and asking you questions that make you feel uncomfortable, ignore them and quickly move away.
- 8) Always remember to tell an adult you trust as soon as possible so that the Police can be notified - if you are able to yourself, call Police on 111. Remember that Police will need a description of the person, so as soon as possible write this down - if you can remember it, a vehicle number plate is very helpful - write this down as soon as possible. Don't worry if you can't get it all right, any part of it is very helpful for the Police.

Finally, we want our young people to remember that personal safety rules apply to all situations, be they with people they know or people they don't know. Don't teach them to fear strangers, as in all likelihood if they are in immediate danger it is a stranger who will be their closest support - one sad fact in New Zealand is that a child is more likely to be harmed by someone they know, rather than a stranger. Therefore, let's focus on behaviour - if it is behaviour they don't like, or behaviour that frightens them, then teach them to get help as soon as possible.

Linley Myers.