

Event Safety & Your Child

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By and large, the living history community is made up of honest, decent people, people with whom I gladly have my children associate. Often, parents develop a sort of naive trust in their fellow reenactors. However, there is no guarantee that this trust should extend to the community at large, or that it extends to the strangers and spectators at an event.

How often have you observed unsupervised children, left to run, play, and entertain themselves at a public event, populated with hundreds or thousands of total strangers? I've watched a young mother prepared to leave her sleeping infant in the tent while she walked half a mile away for an evening entertainment—at a state park over Labor Day weekend, with several thousand strangers in the area. (I asked for the privilege of babysitting, by the way, and spent a pleasant evening cuddling the baby.)

“*Stranger Danger*” is not the only danger facing children at an event, though it is a prime one. Parents should be realistically aware of all the dangers, and do what they can to eliminate much of the risk to their family. Open fires, gunpowder, tent ropes, crowds of strangers, and unfamiliar surroundings are to be anticipated. Education before an event, and diligence during, helps ensure your children have a safe and fun weekend.

Constant adult supervision is a must at any event, no matter how small and familiar. Parents who attend events with children need to accept this basic, and sometimes inconvenient, reality. Not only does the immediate presence of a parent keep the child much more safe from stranger snatchings, a watchful Mother or Father can also head off bad or impolite behavior immediately, and prevent some of childhood's curious proclivities from developing into vandalism or mob behavior.

(Imagine for a moment just what three unsupervised toddlers can do in someone's tent, in less than 5 minutes.)

Children (and teens) should not be allowed to wander anywhere alone—not even to the bathrooms or toilets. (Yet another reason a family chamber pot is a must!)

Sutler Row, with its myriad distractions and strangers, is no place for an unattended child, or pair of children. Even with the best “*Stranger Danger*” training, a child distracted by toys, candies, and the din of the crowd will have his guard down, and be more vulnerable to the enticements or coercion of someone bent on harming them.

I can understand parents needing a break—even convict labor gets a scheduled break or two during the day! This is why attending events with a small circle of friends is so convenient; adults can trade off short bursts of primary responsibility, without compromising the safety of the children. Make these arrangements before the event, and be considerate by limiting the amount of time you leave your children in another's care, and reciprocating where possible.

Beyond strangers, there are many physical dangers present at an event.

Teach even the smallest ones about the dangers of *open fires* and hot fire utensils.

Reduce your fire danger: always keep a bucket of sand or water next to the fire, and locate the pit in an out of the way location when possible.

Dress your children in 100% natural fibers (favoring wool and cotton), and teach them what to do if they or someone else has their clothing catch fire.

Consider *sharing one fire* with several tenting families. Not only does this reduce the number of potential accidents due to multiple fire pits, there is a much higher likelihood of a responsible adult being on hand at all times to tend the fire. Never leave any fire unattended.

Encourage your event planners to provide adequate street widths in camping areas as well. Keeping the fire pits out of the main walking areas increases safety for reenactors and the public.

Make sure your children understand the consequences of playing with *guns and gunpowder*. A good rule of thumb is that unless a parent is immediately present, no child or teen should touch, handle, or sit near guns, powder, or ammunition. Be clear about the dangers of fire and gunpowder together. Reinforce your teaching by arranging a safety lecture for the children the first morning of an event, given by a preferably large soldier in an impressive uniform. One with missing fingers can be especially convincing.

Instruct children to walk only on *established paths*, both in and out of camps (the exception being playing in large, grassy areas, of course), and that walking between tents is impolite (may trip and damage another's tent) and dangerous (may trip and damage self).

Take a quick *tour of the site* immediately upon arrival. Point out where to find the citizen coordinator for your group, where the bathrooms and drinking fountains are located, where the Park Ranger station can be found, and what types of uniformed adults are to be considered “police.” Make sure your child knows how to safely *ask for help* finding you or your camp.

Children who grow up in the reenacting community have many advantages over their peers. They may participate in the research for a family impression, they will socialize with a wide variety of people, learn about public speaking, and spend hours of pleasant association with the family. The minor frustrations and inconveniences of ensuring their safety while doing so are indeed small, when compared to the alternatives.



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