

## SAFETY AND FEARS, HAVING A PLAN

From Coffee with Roleen (March, 2011)

With the tragedy in Japan very much in the air and on people's minds, the topic of safety started before we even hit our seats, while we were still getting coffee and goodies at the home of Alison and Tom (Dashiell's parents). Whenever a local or global situation brings this topic up for people, Roleen says, there is so much conflicting information and advice. But Safety Preparedness is an important topic at the school. They have a plan. They know in which order the teachers leave and who does what. It's all worked out. You need to have a plan as well, as a family. Where would you meet up? Who would be your contact if you are separated and without cell phone contact? Who picks up your child? This would be a good time to make sure you know who needs to be on your emergency form at school, who is allowed to pick up your child. Maybe at this point you could look to other parents you have gotten to know, and add them along with your other names. Your child will not be sent home with anyone who is not on the list. You will not show up and find your child has left with someone who's not on your list. You will know with whom they left by the signature that's on the sign out emergency form. With this discussion, many aspects of safety came up. One mother discussed her panic at her son's request to use the men's room while they were out. How to handle it? She found herself having all those fears, and not knowing the best way to address them to her son. Roleen said it is always appropriate to open the door of the men's or women's rooms, and say "My son/daughter is coming in. I am making sure it's safe. I will be standing at the door." This provides the information for your child, as well as alerting anyone else that you are right there paying attention. It is also always fine to bring your child in to whichever bathroom you use. But in the event that they ask to use their own gender's facilities, you're fine, you can still protect them. As Roleen

mentioned in an earlier Blog topic this week, Betsy Brown Braun's website is a fantastic resource for many of these questions. She recently wrote about ways to discuss (or not to discuss) the situation in Japan with your kids. It might not come up for the NSW children unless they have an older sibling, in which case they may become aware. What they mostly want to know is are they safe? Will the tsunami come here and hurt them, or their families? They may ask questions in many different ways, but that is essentially what they are asking: Am I safe? So you reassure them. You are safe. That happened far, far, far away. It won't happen to you, and we are here to protect you. It comes down to this: they will respond the way you are responding. They will get their cues from your reactions, so be very mindful of what's going on with you—how are you feeling, what are you communicating? Be very careful about what you're saying, how you're describing things. You may be on the phone, thinking they aren't listening. THEY ARE. Betsy Brown Braun says watch out not to whisper, or spell, or use other methods to try to communicate over your kids. They pick up on it and it can create anxiety. It is up to you as a family to say, "What is our plan?" Work it out so everyone knows it. This will help your own anxiety level as well. Often we feel the most nervous when we haven't got a plan, we don't know concretely what steps to follow. We haven't empowered ourselves in controlling our own situation. This causes our own fear. As for the local plan, the city will most likely send a robocall to all home phones, letting you know the plan for the city—where you should go, how to proceed. You may need to walk a long way, be prepared—who is closest to the school? Who can get there? Another family planning method is the "Code Word". There should be a safety word that your family decides upon. That way, if someone approaches your child and says they have been told to pick them up and take them to you, they can ask the person for the code word. You can decide as a family that if they don't know the code word, you don't leave with them. Now, the truth is for very young kids, the odds are that they

still may forget to ask, or not understand. So it certainly is not a cure-all, but it is a tool to add to your arsenal. Roleen says, "The more I know about children, the more I understand how difficult it is to try and teach them something without context. But we feel it's our job. So we talk about strangers and things that may not have any meaning for them and we create a lot of anxiety. Reading Betsy's book about these kinds of hot topics is a good idea. It gives us time to process our own feelings behind the subject." The school itself is probably far more prepared than your home. They have their systems worked out. Even when there are helicopters circling overhead, they take the children inside, or stay low when outdoors, not using the climbing structures. The teachers do not respond to their own curiosity by climbing up and seeing what's happening. The school has an extra car seats, should your child need to leave with another adult but we all agreed that in case of an extreme emergency, car seats may not be what determines safety. This blog is a fantastic resource. Most of you don't even know how much you can do with it. Check out all the things the Emergency Committee has put together for us by clicking on the information on the right of the page. It's good stuff! In any case, it is also important not to go overboard with your fears. Model safety, don't instill your own fears.