



Stranger Danger Awareness in Children with Special Needs: A Meta-Synthesis of Existing Literature

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Abstract

Children with special needs, including those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and intellectual disabilities, face significant challenges in recognizing and responding to potential dangers posed by strangers. Traditional "stranger danger" education programs often fail to accommodate their unique cognitive, social, and communication differences, leaving them more vulnerable to unsafe interactions. This meta-synthesis examines findings from 20 peer-reviewed studies published between 2005 and 2022 to evaluate how children with special needs perceive stranger danger, the effectiveness of existing safety education strategies, and barriers to their implementation. Results indicate that children with developmental disabilities struggle with risk perception, distinguishing safe from unsafe strangers, and applying learned safety skills in real-world situations. Conventional verbal instruction proves insufficient, while video modeling, behavioral skills training (BST), social stories, and in situ training with immediate feedback demonstrate greater effectiveness in enhancing abduction-prevention skills. Findings also underscore the critical role of parental and educator involvement in reinforcing learned behaviors. To improve safety education for children with special needs, future research should focus on developing and evaluating neurodiverse-friendly interventions, assessing their long-term effectiveness, and integrating technology-assisted learning tools. Additionally, policy reforms are essential to enhance training for educators, caregivers, and law enforcement, ensuring a more inclusive and effective approach to child safety.

Keywords: stranger danger, special needs, autism spectrum disorder, behavioral skills training, child safety.