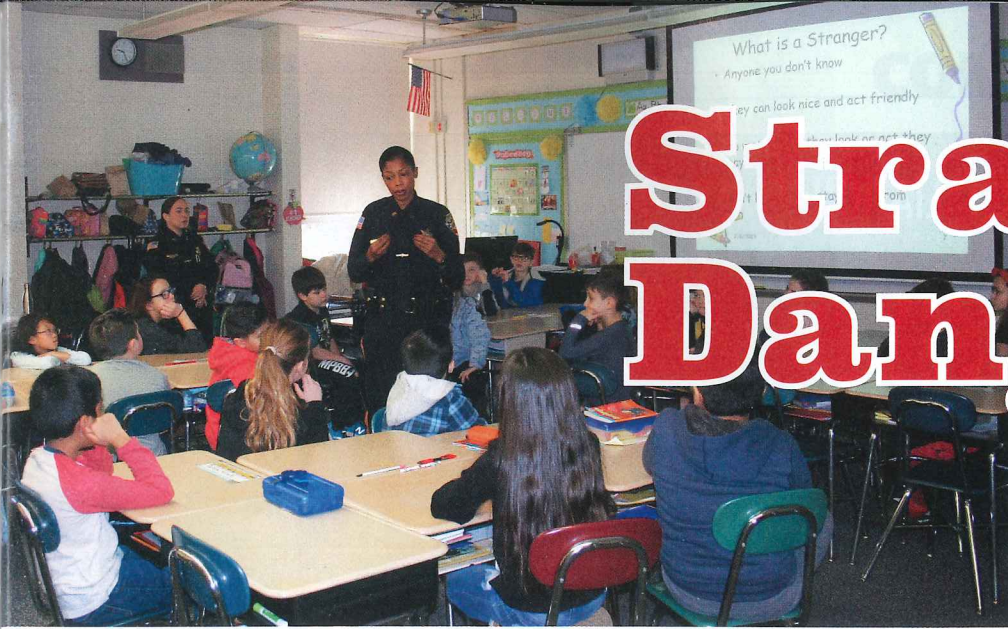


Stranger Danger

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An innovative program about stranger danger keeps two Monmouth County sheriff's officers busy teaching about preventive measures to pre-school and elementary school students.

On Oct. 11, 2013, Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden introduced a bilingual program for elementary school students at Midtown Community School in Neptune, New Jersey, called Dangers of Strangers. Six years later, one of the two original instructors, bi-lingual Officer Iliana Santos, has been joined by Officer Michelle Melendez. The duo conducts the Dangers of Strangers program at elementary schools throughout Monmouth County.

"The safety and security of our children remains a principal concern for the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office," said Sheriff Shaun Golden. "That's why it is vital that children are made aware, and often reminded, about the dangers of strangers. Strangers have a way of luring children into harmful or possibly fatal situations through bribes and false claims such as a family emergency, a fake injury, or a lost pet."

The two sheriff's officers complement each other well. They have known each other since elementary school, both are married with young children and both have a passion for child safety. That passion shows in their dedication to continually updating the Dangers of Strangers program to keep the material current and relevant. Over the years, segments have been modified to cover the dangers to children over social media, cellphones, and even in interactive online video games.

Most recently, video segments have been added to the programs to illustrate how criminals try to lure young children to go along with them in a car or to a secluded

area. The program is continually updated to keep it as contemporary as possible.

A brochure is given to each student that covers all of the safety measures covered in the presentation so that the child and parents can review what was taught in the lesson. The program covers:

- What is a stranger, the difference between good and bad strangers
- What to do if a stranger talks to you
- Safety tips on inappropriate touching and feeling uncomfortable
- Safety tips inside the home
- What to do when you are home alone
- Tricks used by strangers to get you to go with them
- How to answer the telephone when no one else is in the house
- An exercise and demonstration on the importance of using the "Buddy System" when going places in and around your community.

The program is offered to the Spanish-speaking community with bi-lingual Sheriff's Officer Iliana Santos with brochures and a parent letter also in a Spanish version.

The program was scheduled for all third-grade classes at C. Richard Applegate School, Freehold Township, New Jersey by Guidance Counselor Diana Whille, in conjunction with third-grade teachers Lisa Cicero, Janet Giglio, Jaclyn Doyle and JoAnn Zamrzycki and presented on Feb. 7, 2019. A total of 74 students attended the two back-to-back sessions.

Following the program, teachers and students were asked their reaction to the presentation. Teacher Lisa Cicero said, "The presentation was extremely informative and kid friendly, and the students were highly engaged." Teacher Jackie Doyle said,

"The presentation highlighted the importance of children being aware of their surroundings and identifying trusted adults around them. The officers also reminded students to share with their families the tips they learned about staying safe, whether they are at the playground or on the internet. It is an important conversation for teachers and parents to continually have with their children!"

Student reactions were also very positive including remarks from third-graders: "It was so much fun, and I want to do it again," said Amber. Mathew said, "I learned what to do if someone is calling on the phone and you do not know their phone number or voice. You should hang up or get an adult." And Emma told us, "I think it was important that the officers came, so that if we ever see a stranger or feel like we are in an uncomfortable situation, we know what to do. We're ready thanks to them."

"I am proud to have the opportunity to offer sixteen youth outreach programs to our schools in Monmouth County" said Sheriff Shaun Golden. "Children are Monmouth County's most valuable natural resource and our youth outreach programs are designed to protect and preserve that natural resource."

Since 2015, over 100 Dangers of Strangers programs have been conducted reaching over 10,000 elementary school students. Officers Santos and Melendez are also involved in conducting numerous other outreach programs including Career Days, Distracted Driving, Lock Your Meds, SEEK 9-1-1, ACES 9-1-1, Gold Star Senior Travel, Keeping Your Keys – Senior Safe Driving, Sheriff Youth Week and many others. 