

Article for July 2, 2014

Keep Your Amusement Park Adventure Amazing!

It's that time of year when amusement parks are buzzing, water parks are splashing, and carnivals are in full swing! Such fun family time is at hand! Let's try to keep that amusement park adventure amazing by doing a little preparation before you leave home and while you're enjoying yourselves!

First and foremost, remember that amusement rides aren't really magic! We'd love them to be, and we don't want to spoil the fun, so parents should never forget that you're loading children – sometimes very young children – onto heavy machinery and exposing them to water hazards at water parks. There's no need for unnecessary fear, but just like we teach traffic safety and bike safety, we need to help teach our children water safety and heavy equipment safety! Don't worry, you can all still have plenty of fun and be safe, too!

Start out by choosing which rides you and your children will ride and use good judgment, just like you do when you decide which foods or TV shows or toys are safe for your child. When deciding whether or not a ride is safe for your child, base the decision on what you know about your child and how secure the ride appears to be for children. Use YOUR judgment, not the ride operator who may be offering reassuring words to hoax you on the ride.

Watch the ride with your child before boarding and read the warning signs posted aloud. Talk to your child about the loading and unloading locations and procedures. Point out the ride attendants and let your child know that sometimes the ride will stop temporarily, but they should not attempt to get off until the attendant tells them to. Let them know that if they get frightened while the ride is moving, to NOT get out of the car. Keep a positive tone and explain that most rides – especially the ones you are allowing your child on – are usually not dangerous as long as riders hold on tight, stay seated and keep their hands and feet inside. Don't put your child on a ride that they're afraid of! It sounds like common sense, but your child's first impulse may be to get away from whatever is frightening them. Children are hurt every year from such situations.

Always obey minimum height, age, weight and health restrictions – but there's more! Just because your child is tall enough to ride a ride, their developmental level should also be considered! Also, don't put a child on a ride they've outgrown. If you can't count on your child to stay seated with hands and feet inside, don't let him or her ride. Always make sure they are using the safety equipment provided, but remember that there are limitations. If the lap bar doesn't fit securely, a fast-moving ride can cause a child to slip completely out from underneath the bar. They are normally neither childproof nor child-safe. Use good judgment when deciding whether your child should ride.

There are many other safety tips that you should put in place while on amusement park outings with your family, but with small children in particular, make sure you let them know what the uniformed park employees look like and let them know who is in charge of finding lost parents. With any age in tow, always begin the day by pointing out a meeting place, in case family members get separated. Setting a code word ahead of time is always a good idea, in case you do need to have someone else meet the children in an emergency. So, ride the rides, enjoy the water, and Be Safe Out There!