



Back to School...Safely



While transportation, playground and overall physical safety remain a priority, on-line issues such as bullying, stalking and the posting of

We encourage parents to keep their kids accountable on-line and to educate them about the potential dangers

inappropriate content have pushed to the forefront of the Novi Police Department's efforts to keep kids safe. Incidents like Columbine and, more recently, the Sandy Hook Elementary tragedy, have also heightened awareness, said Novi Police

Department's School Resource Officer Jon Zabick.

"Although we have long been proponents of community oriented policing, we have enhanced, even more so, our efforts to have district officers connect with the schools every day and engage youth throughout Novi," he said. "They are likely the first responders to any suspicious activities at the schools."

Approximately 6,300 children attend the Novi Community School District while thousands of others attend the City's portion of the Walled Lake, Northville, and South Lyon districts or private schools. Zabick said the challenge for officers is to get familiar with school buildings,

administrators and staff to foster "familiarity and understanding."

All of those efforts, he added, will hopefully help avoid serious incidents. "Post Sandy Hook, we met with school officials to look at ways to enhance our partnerships," said Zabick, who ironically took over as SRO the day of the tragedy last December. "We are fortunate we have not experienced the kind of tragedies other communities have, but our team is not satisfied to sit back and rest on that as if it were some sort of accomplishment. We recognize these incidents can happen anywhere and every day must work with our schools and youth, educating them and our staff, constantly reviewing

Story continued on page 16

procedures in place and revising when necessary to ensure our community and facilities are safe.”

For parents, on-line safety, mainly in the form of social networking, should start as early as the fourth or fifth grade. Students have generally set aside Facebook, but have found many other outlets such as Twitter and Instagram, Zabick said.



Posting in-appropriate pictures or phone numbers, or bullying, can lead to unintended consequences.

“Parents really need to be vigilant in terms of the social networking because kids don’t always use the best judgment,” said Zabick. “Students, as they get older, don’t always make the best decisions and sometimes in the course of making those bad decisions, they may talk to people on-line who get them into a position they don’t want to be in, such as arranging for off-line meetings. Parents’ best defense is a good offense,” Zabick said, in terms of closely monitoring social networking.

“We encourage parents to keep their kids accountable on-line and to educate them about the potential dangers,” he commented, “so kids make smart decisions about what they post and how they respond on-line.”

Parents must demand full access to their children’s social media accounts, Zabick said. That means having passwords and going back on a daily basis, if necessary, to see what their child has been posting. “In certain instances, it may be best to keep your kid off of social networking if they’re proving they can’t handle it, or if they’re

getting themselves in trouble.”

The SRO spends most of his time at Novi High, but also visits each of the district’s other schools and tailors his activities to meet their needs. One area he often advises on is transportation safety, particularly bus stop awareness.

In the case of any suspicious activities, pick up the phone and call the Police Department, Zabick said. “We investigate all matters. Nothing is more important to us than our community. Our kids are the most precious gifts we have. When someone calls saying there’s something suspicious going on around one of the schools, myself or one of the patrol officers respond quickly and look into the incident.”

No one knows the morning routine off-to-school routine better than parents. That fact makes them the first line of defense. “When something stands out, when something looks strange, when something looks odd or suspicious, there’s a good possibility that maybe it is,” Zabick added. “We cannot stress enough, if you see something, say something.”

Suspects will often try to lure children into a vehicle by asking for help or offering



candy. Kids should always have that stranger-danger mentality, Zabick said. He recommends your child run to safe place for help or to simply scream and shout. “Advise them to do whatever can help them.”

For more back to school safety information, visit cityofnovi.org.

National Safety Council (NSC) school safety tips

Swings

Swings are the pieces of moving equipment that are most likely to cause injuries to children. Animal swings have caused several deaths and should not be used. Metal or wooden seats should be replaced with soft seats. Swings should be set far enough away from other equipment so that children won’t be hit by a moving swing. Only two swings should be in each supporting framework, and they should be at least 24 inches apart. Full-bucket seats are recommended for younger children. Half-bucket seats are dangerous because babies and toddlers can slide out of them.

Safe seesaws and merry-go-rounds

Spring-loaded seesaws are best for young children. Avoid adjustable seesaws with chains because children can crush their hands under the chains. A traditional seesaw should have a tire or some other object under the seat to keep it from hitting the ground. Merry-go-rounds, or “whirls” or “roundabouts,” are best for school-age children. They should have hand grips, and the rotating platform should be level, free of sharp edges and have adequate clearance to prevent crushing or severing limbs.

Climb carefully

More children are injured falling off climbing equipment or horizontal ladders than anything else on the playground. Children under 4 shouldn’t play on this equipment. Watch older children when they’re climbing, check that steps and handrails are in good condition and make sure a guardrail or barrier surrounds raised platforms. Any climbing ropes should be secured at the top and bottom. The number of injuries caused by monkey bars is so significant that many experts recommend that they be removed from all playgrounds.

Backpacks

Overloaded backpacks used by children have received a lot of attention from parents, doctors, school administrators and the media in the past several years. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates there are more than 7,300 backpack-related injuries annually treated by hospitals and doctors. Injuries include bruises, sprains and strains to the back and shoulder and fractures. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that a child’s backpack should weigh no more than 10 to 20 percent of the child’s body weight. This figure may vary, however, depending on the child’s body strength and fitness.