

PROTECTING WHAT'S

PRICELESS

While the perks of a career in professional sports are many, the job also comes with drawbacks. One of the most significant is the danger of fame. And when you're in the limelight—and much about you is public knowledge—the attention you get often spills over to those closest to you: members of your family.

It's a sad fact that your high-profile position makes you and your loved ones prime targets for thieves, kidnappers and blackmailers. To help you keep your family safe, OT enlisted the help of several experts—retired FBI agent Vincent deLaMontaigne, private investigator Dennis Thornton and security consultant Chris E. McGoey—who gave us valuable tips on child safety and family security.

Enroll the family in a self-defense class

McGoey works with families of top executives and Hollywood celebrities on a regular basis. He asserts that high-profile people, especially athletes, should attend self-defense training along with their entire family. "Athletes, by their very nature, tend to confront the danger, and thereby put their family at risk," says McGoey, who also notes that affluent children of celebrities are sometimes over-protected and ill-equipped to deal with the harsh realities of the street. "Children and spouses must discuss how to react to personal confrontation when in public, and have

IT'S A SAD FACT:

FAME CAN PUT YOUR FAMILY AT RISK. HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON HOW TO SAFEGUARD THEM

By Jenna Sampson

escape plans, retreat locations if separated, and key contact persons clearly in mind."

Buy additional security

McGoey suggests that all family members be equipped with GPS communications devices and cell technology so they can be located at any moment. He also recommends adding such security features to family vehicles as smash-resistant

glazing, release mechanisms in the trunk, run-flat tires, first-aid supplies and pepper spray. In addition to high-tech gadgets, make sure your children memorize important names, addresses and phone numbers in case they get lost or separated.

Consider background checks for everyone

Your personal information can be leaked by household staff members and contractors, McGoey warns. That's where someone like private investigator Vincent delaMontaigne, who specializes in providing background checks for athletes, comes in. DelaMontaigne—vice president of The Baker Street Group, a private inves-

should only be released to designated staff members once they arrive at school, and should never be allowed to walk home alone.

➤ **Come up with a recognizable password**

Tell your children that if you couldn't reach them in case of an emergency, they should only trust another adult if that adult knows the password that you and your children have discussed in advance. Make sure your children commit that password to memory. Furthermore, never write your child's name on gym clothes, and don't allow them to wear clothing that identifies them (like a Little League jacket with his or her name

school, be aware of cars attempting to follow you to your residence. Always have the police department's telephone number in your cell phone directory, and call the police if you feel the same car is following you repeatedly. "A dispatcher will guide you to the nearest station, or have you meet the nearest officer at a certain point to assess the situation and find out who is in the following car," says Thornton.

➤ **Watch the overzealous fan**

Watch out for the overzealous fan. If, for example, you're out to dinner with the family and being harassed, Thornton says

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—Chris E. McGoey, security expert

tigation firm comprised of former FBI and IRS agents—spent 22 years fighting organized crime and narcotics for the FBI, and now serves as the security liaison between the San Diego Chargers and the NFL. "The league, through the Players Association, provides a background-check service to the players if they need to investigate someone they want to employ or do business with," says delaMontaigne. "For example, if a player wants to hire an architect to build a house, or a nanny to watch his kids, I'll check them out."

Players get threatened all the time, and not just from rival fans. DelaMontaigne says that's a serious matter, and if he finds that a threat is credible, he can arrange for private security until the problem is solved.

Pay close attention to your children

Children are, of course, the most vulnerable to predators, and you must use extra precaution to protect them. In fact, according to private investigator Dennis Thornton—who spent 20 years patrolling the streets of San Diego County as a police officer—police training videos reveal that 99.9 percent of children tested with common kidnapping ploys take the bait. He gives the following advice on how to help keep your children safe:

➤ **Always escort children to school**

Children shouldn't be left alone—even if they're on their way to school. A parent or caregiver should always be with them. They

engraved on it). People can easily gain a child's trust by using the child's first name and pretending to know the parent.

➤ **Talk to your kids about strangers**

Tell them about common ploys used to separate children from their parents. Enroll your children in a child-safety program (see sidebar).

➤ **Be aware of your surroundings**

When you pick up your children from

the easiest way to protect your family is to involve as many people as possible as you try to leave. "Solicit help from restaurant employees to get out of the restaurant, or move to the back of the restaurant," suggests Thornton. "Let a waiter or waitress know the situation, and have them either empty the restaurant or have patrons sit down or leave. Always call the police if the situation gets worse."



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Here are some additional resources to help safeguard your family

KIDPOWER (www.kidpower.org)

This organization provides workshops across the U.S. that teach children how to stay safe and act wisely with strangers, bullies and people they know. Teachers coach students on how to be aware, not wary, and avoid fear-based teaching.

PROJECT SAFEKIDS (www.projectsafekids.org)

This proactive children's organization partners with law enforcement, communities and corporate sponsors to provide child safety programs across the country.

For additional safety tips, visit security expert Chris E. McGoey's Web site at www.crimedoctor.com.