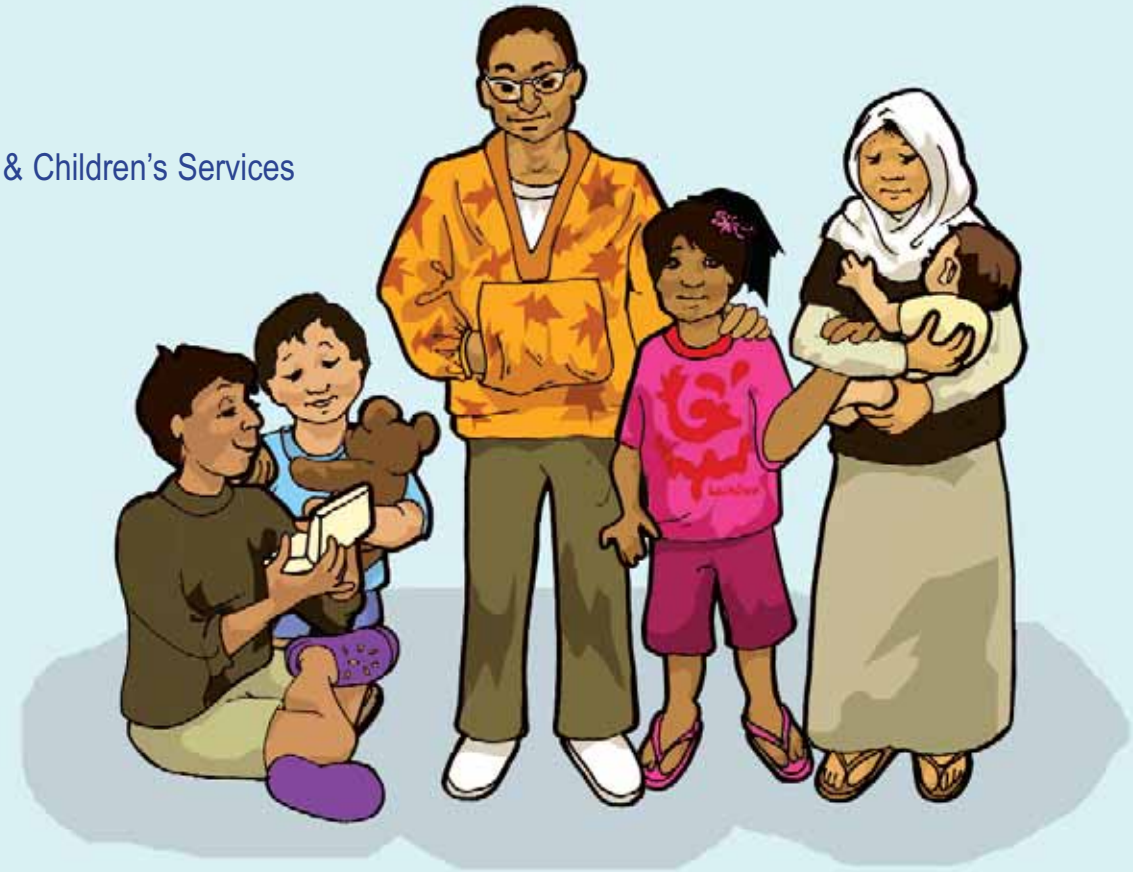
Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services



RAISING CHILDREN IN A NEW COUNTRY:
An Illustrated Handbook

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BRYCS

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS), a project of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), provides national technical assistance to "bridge the gap" between public child welfare and other mainstream organizations, refugee and immigrant serving agencies, and newcomer communities. BRYCS' overarching goal is to strengthen the capacity of service organizations across the United States to ensure the successful development of refugee and newcomer children, youth, and families through targeted training, consultation, development of cutting-edge resources, and a Web-based clearinghouse. Please visit www.brycs.org for more information.

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This means "no".

Introduction

Refugee and immigrant families come to the United States with a wealth of parenting strengths, drawing on culture, tradition and family experience. Like most parents in the U.S., they tend to be responsible and nurturing, and have often sacrificed tremendously to provide their children with an opportunity for safety and success in this new country. At the same time, it is clear that newcomer parents often need assistance adapting to: a new physical environment with unaccustomed dangers; the loss of extended family and community support; the ineffectiveness (and sometimes illegality) of traditional methods of discipline; and their children's new and often unfamiliar "Americanized" behaviors. Unfortunately, the challenges of parenting in a new environment, combined with difficult financial circumstances and the stress of family role changes, can sometimes lead to these newcomers' involvement with the child welfare system.

This booklet was created for agencies serving refugees and immigrants in order to support their efforts to ensure that newcomer parents have the basic information they need about U.S. laws and parenting practices. Although newcomers may find the booklet useful by itself, it is primarily intended for case managers and other service providers to use together with their refugee and immigrant clients. The booklet is targeted to newcomer parents with low levels of English proficiency and/or low literacy levels. Since the often complex concepts illustrated here are necessarily simplified, the resource section (pages 28-31) provides easy-to-access information for service providers to supplement the basic points in this booklet. For best results, BRYCS recommends using this booklet in culturally appropriate parent support groups, preferably run by at least one experienced newcomer parent of the same ethnicity and one U.S.-born parent, where refugee and immigrant parents can ask questions, try out new behaviors, and find positive support to help ease their transition (see the BRYCS publication Parenting in a New Country: A Toolkit for Working with Newcomer Parents, http://www.brycs.org/documents/raisingchildreninanewcountry_web.pdf for more information on parent support groups, including curricula and other educational information).

BRYCS' technical assistance and publications, including this booklet, are guided by the following beliefs:

1) For refugee and immigrant children and youth, it is important to maintain (or, if they arrived at a young age, to develop) a strong and positive connection to their ethnic heritage, in addition to a positive identity as American (biculturalism). This helps to keep families strong and thereby provides the support that children need to succeed in this country.

2) For service providers, it is important to use family- and community-centered, strengths-based approaches with refugees and immigrants. These approaches maximize the chances that services will be accepted by and effective for newcomer families.

3) For communities, collaboration among service providers is vital for effective services. BRYCS especially promotes collaboration between refugee/immigrant-serving agencies and mainstream agencies such as Child Protective Services (CPS). For example, ethnic community based organizations and refugee resettlement agencies can often provide access to interpretation, cultural consultations and training, culturally-competent assessment, and culturally-appropriate, specialized services to ensure these agencies' responses to newcomers are effective, while CPS can provide referrals to a range of services that newcomers may not usually get.

Introduction, continued

This illustrated booklet emphasizes the following five themes:

1) Nurture: Since the pace of life is often fast in the U.S. and both parents may be expected to work, finding time to spend with children can be challenging. Activities such as family meals and bedtime can be important opportunities for nurture and for continuing cultural traditions.

2) Supervision/Protection: Parents are responsible for supervising their own children in the U.S.—both inside and outside the home—and for keeping children safe from harm.

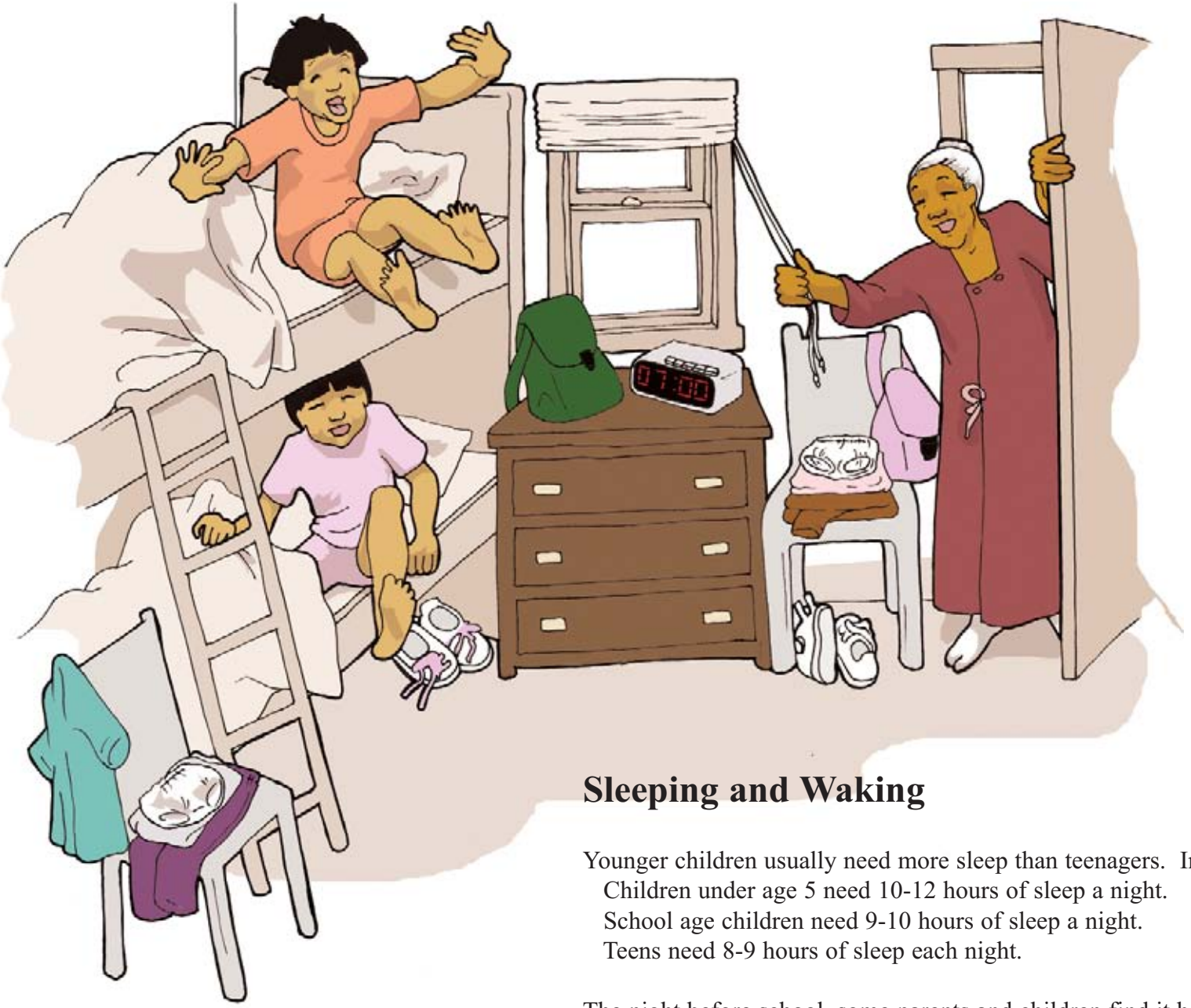
3) Structure/Limits: In this fast-paced life, it helps children if parents maintain a daily schedule/routine and set limits or rules (about things such as eating junk food; using the Internet, video games, or TV; helping with household chores; and playing with friends). Such structure can also help support and reinforce discipline and respect.

4) Discipline/Respect: Discipline methods vary by culture. Common methods in the U.S. include positive reinforcement, time outs, limiting privileges, or establishing consequences. It is important to know what is acceptable here and what is not, so that newcomer families can then adapt these methods for their own use, or come up with blended methods that work for their family. Regardless, discipline is most effective when applied consistently and when desired behavior is modeled by parents.

5) Educational Participation: The expectation for parental involvement in children's education is new to some refugee and immigrant parents, since education is viewed as primarily the teacher's responsibility in many countries. In the U.S., parents are expected to participate in their children's education by meeting with teachers and attending school events; at home, parents can assist with their children's homework and encourage regular reading and other educational activities.

This booklet focuses mainly on parenting younger children. Establishing good communication and discipline when children are younger provides an important basis for maintaining good relationships with teenagers. For more information on refugee and immigrant teens, see BRYCS' Growing Up in a New Country: A Positive Youth Development Toolkit for Working with Refugees and Immigrants (http://www.brycs.org/documents/GrowingUpInANewCountry-Web.pdf).

This illustrated booklet remains a work in progress. We received substantial input from service providers during its development (see Acknowledgments, page 32), however, we hope to continue to receive feedback as it is used and tested in the field. Our goal is to continue to improve this booklet so that it is as useful as possible for agencies and the newcomers they serve. Please send all suggestions for future editions to info@brycs.org.

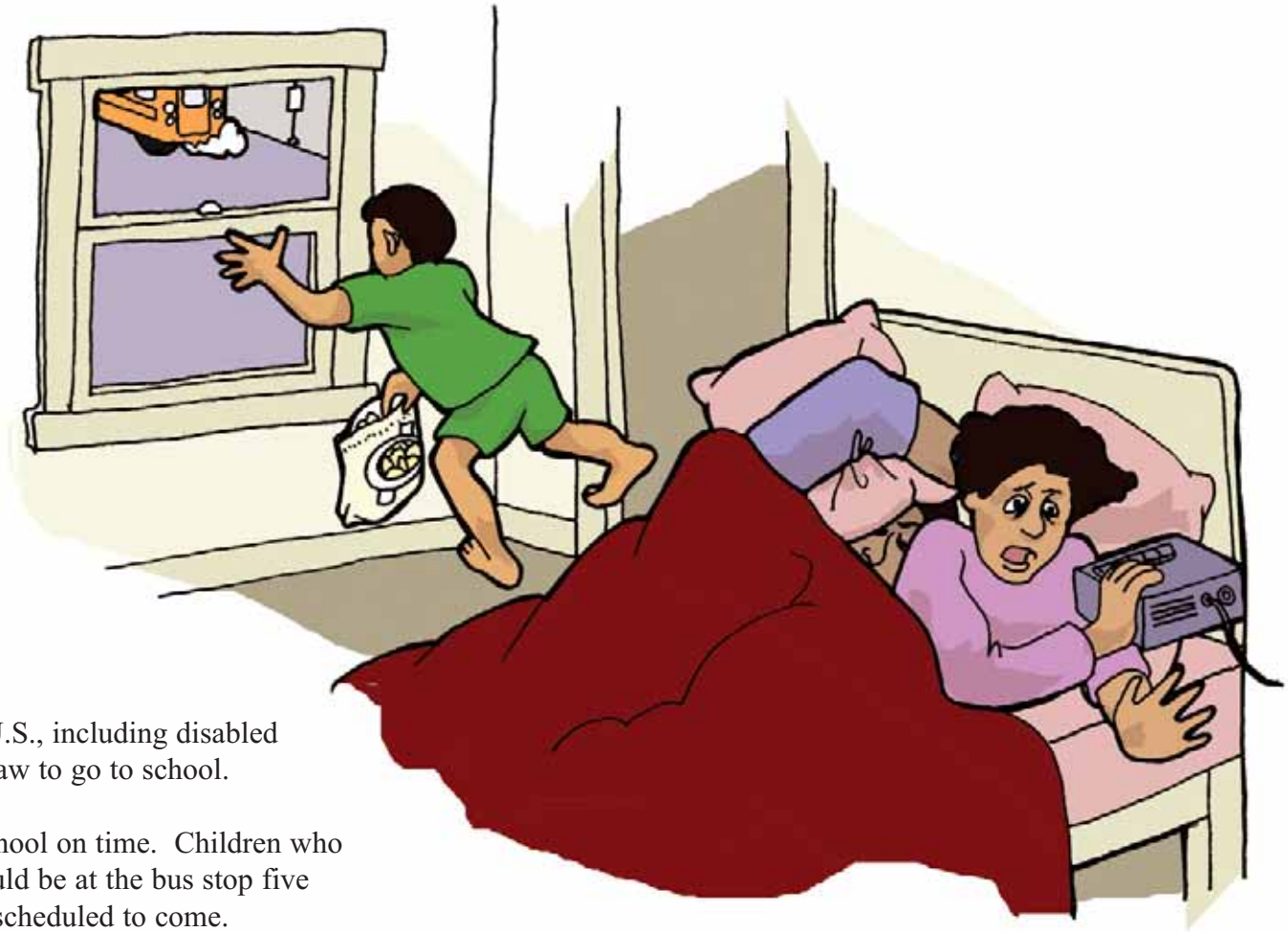


Sleeping and Waking

Younger children usually need more sleep than teenagers. In general:

- Children under age 5 need 10-12 hours of sleep a night.
- School age children need 9-10 hours of sleep a night.
- Teens need 8-9 hours of sleep each night.

The night before school, some parents and children find it helpful to lay out the clothes and books they will need for school the next day.



Going to School

All girls and boys in the U.S., including disabled children, are required by law to go to school.

Children must arrive at school on time. Children who ride the bus to school should be at the bus stop five minutes before the bus is scheduled to come.

If children are late or absent from school, parents should call the school to explain. Ask for an interpreter, if needed. Never use a child as an interpreter.

Meals and Nutrition

Children need to eat a healthy breakfast before school so they have energy to learn.

Children in the U.S. usually eat 3 meals a day, with 1 or 2 snacks during the day. A meal should include a staple (rice, corn, or wheat); protein (meat or beans); and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Drink plenty of water, and limited amounts of fruit juices and milk.

Street Safety

Adults should help children cross the street safely. Use crosswalks, and teach young children to “stop, look and listen” before crossing the street.

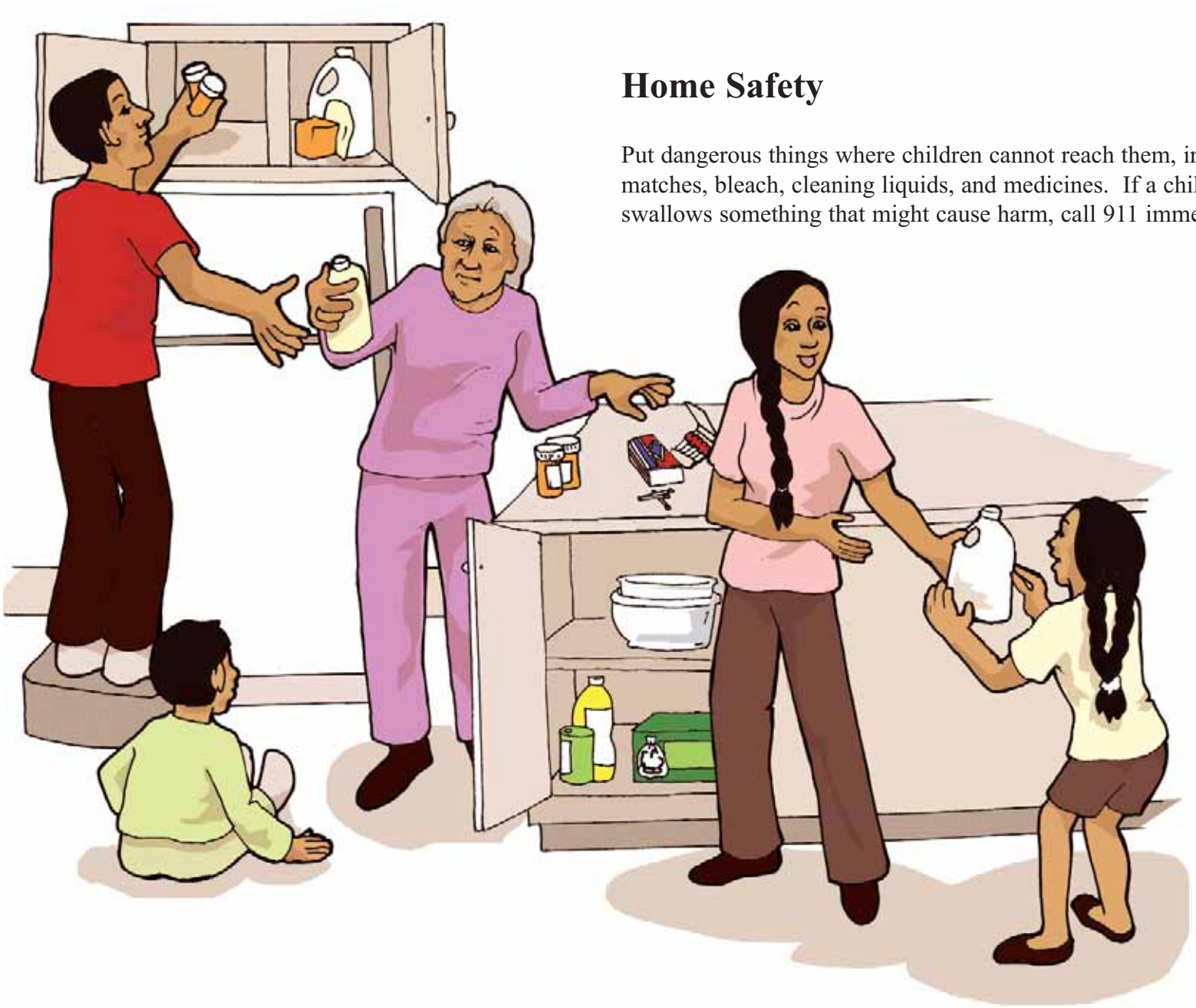
Make sure children have the clothing they need for the weather.

Car Safety

Never leave children under 10 years old alone in a car.

Seatbelts

Most states require people to use seat belts when they ride in a car. Usually, people in the front seat must wear a seat belt, children under age 4 must be in child-sized car seats, and children between ages 4 and 8 may need booster seats.



Home Safety

Put dangerous things where children cannot reach them, including matches, bleach, cleaning liquids, and medicines. If a child swallows something that might cause harm, call 911 immediately.

Child Supervision

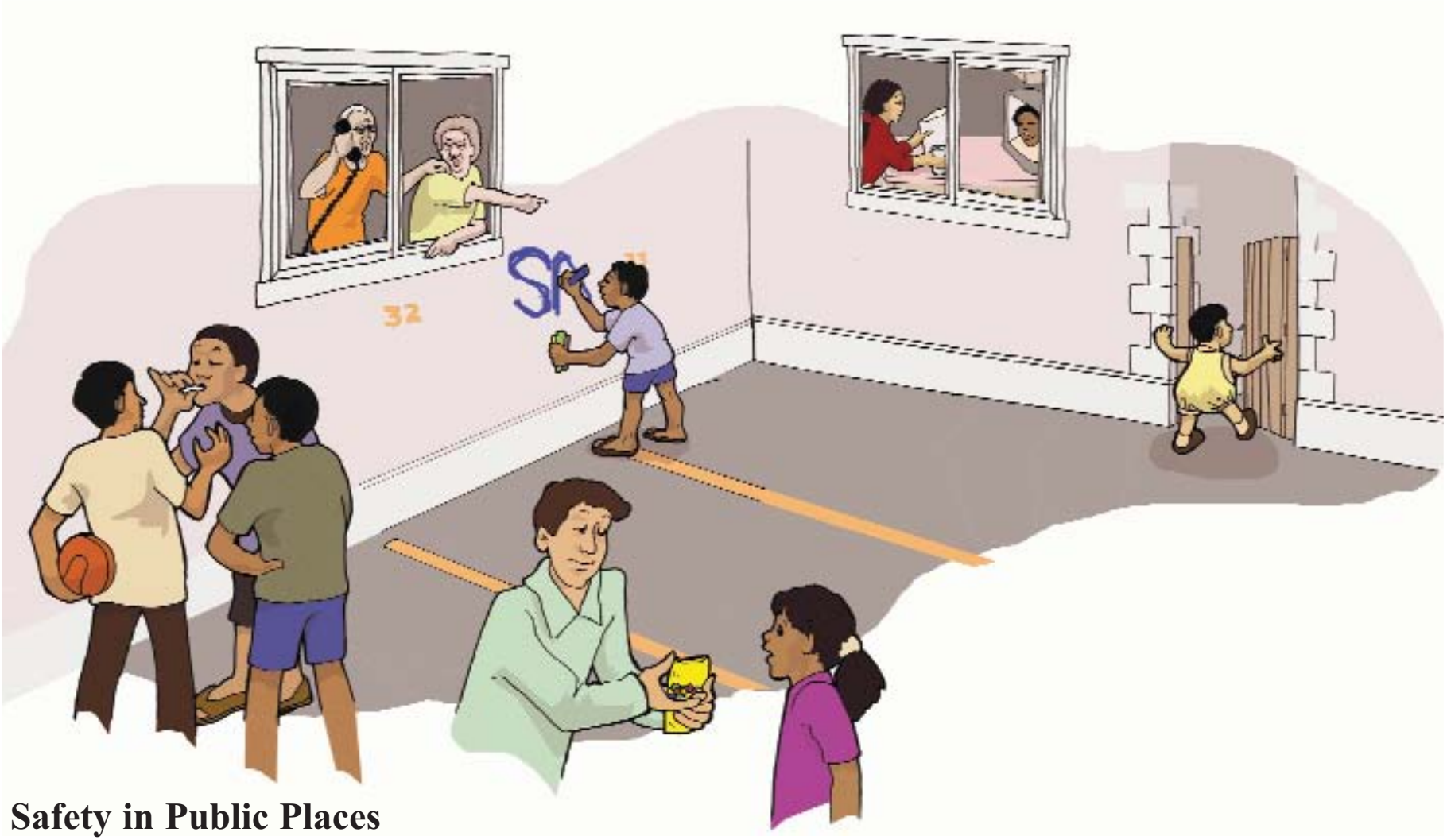
Parents are expected to watch their own children and to know what their children are doing. Neighbors will not watch someone else's children unless they are asked and they have said yes.

Child supervision guidelines are different for every state. Here are some general guidelines:

7 and under	8-10 years	11-12 years	13-15 years	16-17 years
Do not leave alone.	Don't leave alone more than 90 minutes during the day or early evening.	May be left alone up to 3 hours, but not late at night.	May be left alone, but not overnight.	May be left alone, in some cases up to 2 overnights.

Children who are left alone should always know how to get in touch with parents or another responsible adult and to call 911 in case of an emergency.

Children in the U.S. usually do not start baby-sitting until age 11 or 12 and may not watch young children or infants until age 15.



Safety in Public Places

Children under age 8 should be supervised at all times, especially in public places. Children over age 8 should ask parents' permission before going out alone or with friends.

Parents should teach children not to take candy or gifts from people their families do not know, and to tell a trusted adult if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable.

Warn children about the dangers of drugs, alcohol, and smoking.

Showing Children Attention

Sometimes children will misbehave to get parents' attention. Children are happier when parents spend time with them, including talking, listening, and having fun together.

Discipline

Harsh physical discipline, such as slapping, hitting, beating, or shaking hard enough to leave a mark or to injure a child, is illegal in the U.S. Certain people, such as teachers, doctors and social workers, must report marks on a child that could be signs of child abuse.

Since any physical discipline can become harsh, and because children learn better from other methods of discipline, many people in the U.S. do not use physical discipline today.

The next three pages show common discipline methods used in the U.S.

Time Outs

"Time outs" are often used for children up to age 8, by making a regular place where a child is sent to sit alone, calm down and think about his or her actions.

Use the child's age as a guide: for example, 2 minutes for a 2-year-old, and 3 minutes for a 3-year-old.

Parents should explain calmly to the child how to behave correctly in the future.

Rewards and Consequences

Children ages 6-12 can be disciplined with rewards and consequences.

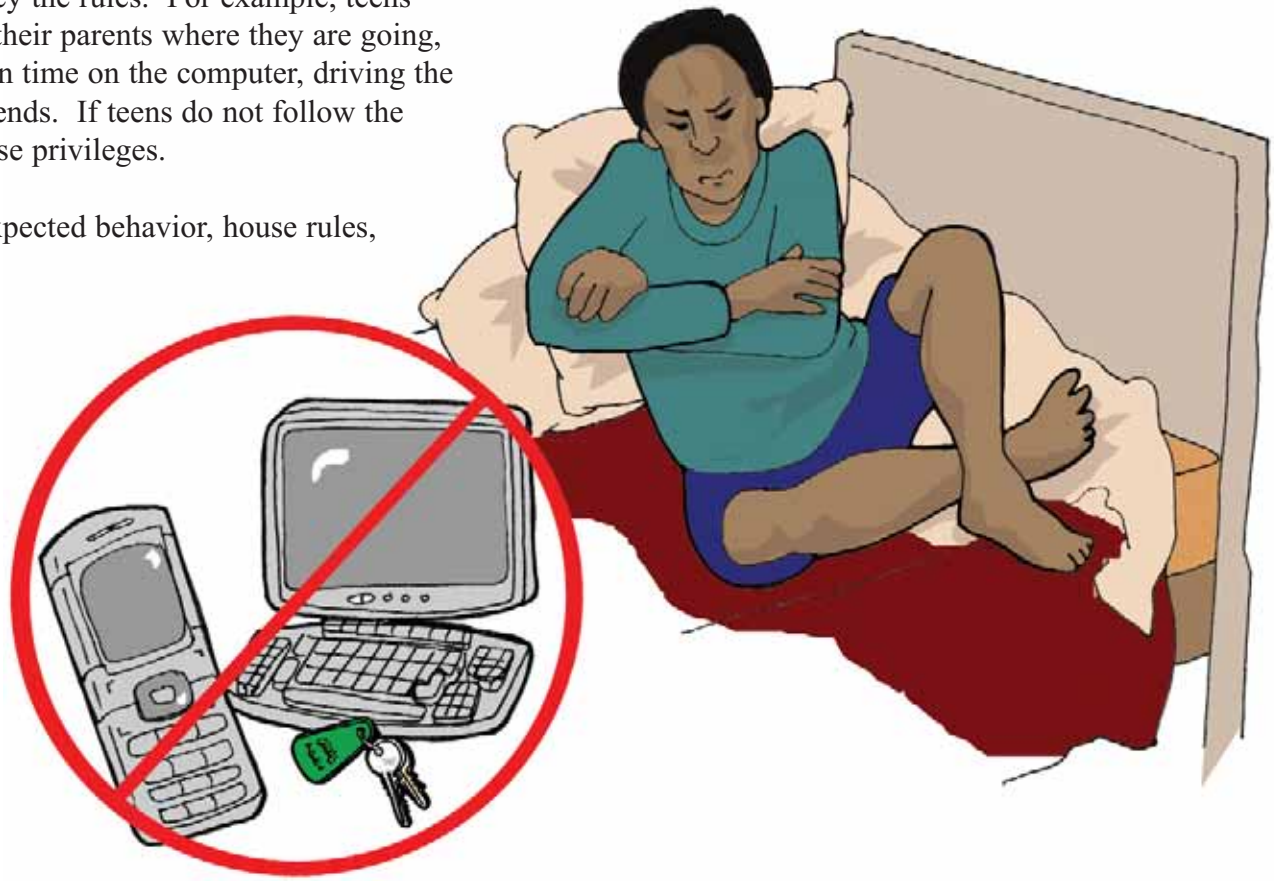
Reward children for good behavior, for example, letting them watch a special TV program for making their bed every day or allowing them to play with a friend if they help with the dishes.

Take away something children like when they disobey parents, for example, not letting children play outside after school because they did not tidy their bedroom.

Privileges and Limits

Teenagers can earn privileges when they obey parents' rules and lose privileges when they disobey the rules. For example, teens who complete their chores, tell their parents where they are going, and come home on time can earn time on the computer, driving the car, using the phone, or with friends. If teens do not follow the rules, parents can take away these privileges.

Be clear and consistent about expected behavior, house rules, rewards, and consequences.



Child Protective Services (CPS)

Occasionally, a family that is reported for possible child abuse or neglect may get a home visit by a caseworker or a police officer from Child Protective Services (CPS) to make sure that the child is safe.

There are four types of harm to children:

1) Physical abuse: Injury to a child from actions such as beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking or other ways of harming a child.
2) Child neglect: Abandoning, or not supervising a child; not meeting a child's physical, educational, or medical needs; however being poor does not mean parents are neglectful.
3) Sexual abuse: Any sexual activity between a child and an adult.
4) Emotional abuse: Frequent screaming, name calling, or rejection of the child.

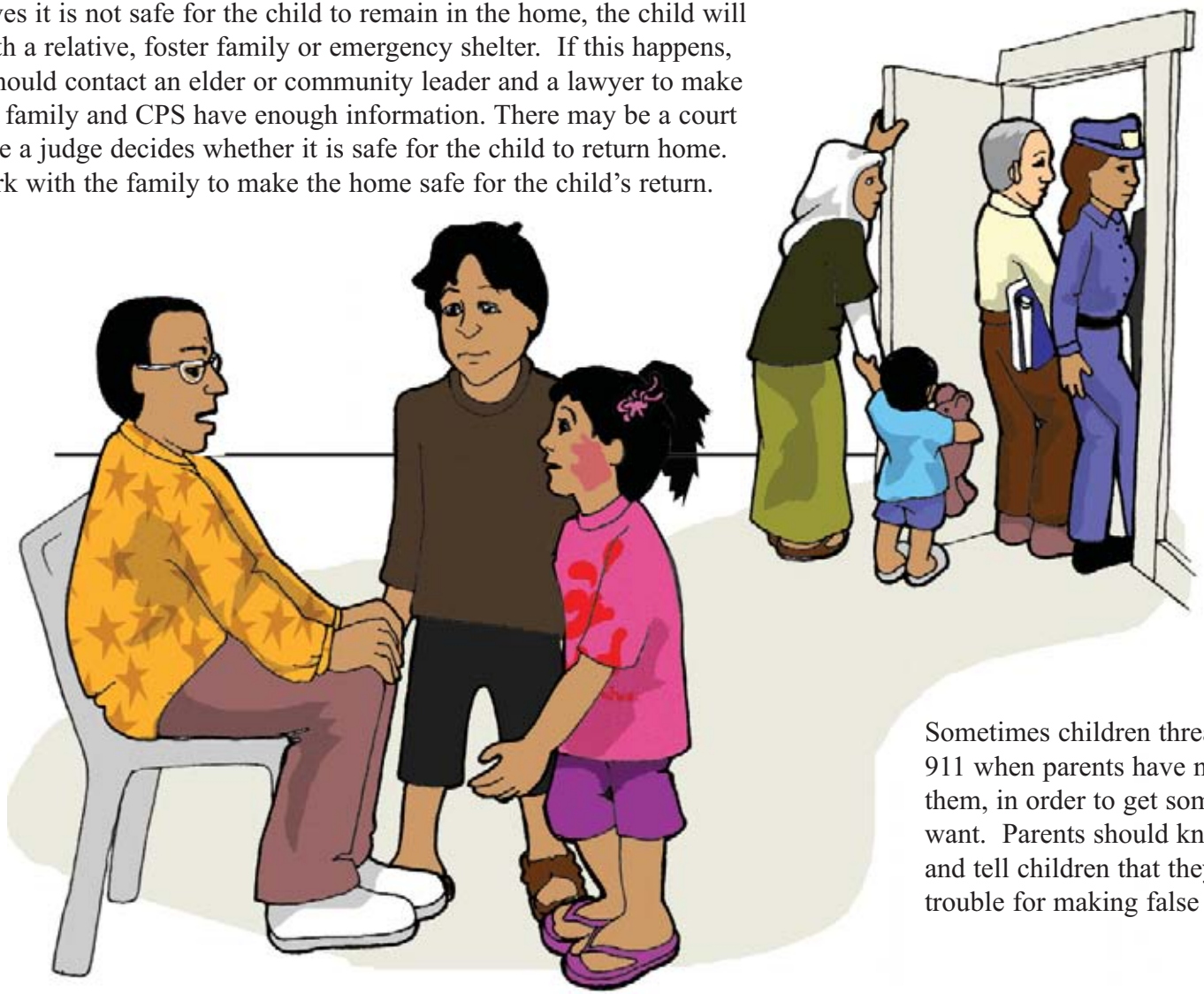
Most families are never visited by CPS. However, families that are visited by CPS should stay calm and cooperative, and should make sure the worker brings an interpreter or cultural liaison to help with communication and understanding. Children should never be used as interpreters.

Child Protective Services (continued)

CPS will help the family learn to resolve conflicts and use effective discipline methods with their children. They may help the family get needed services in the home or at an agency.

Child Protective Services (continued)

If CPS believes it is not safe for the child to remain in the home, the child will be placed with a relative, foster family or emergency shelter. If this happens, the parents should contact an elder or community leader and a lawyer to make sure both the family and CPS have enough information. There may be a court hearing where a judge decides whether it is safe for the child to return home. CPS will work with the family to make the home safe for the child's return.



Sometimes children threaten to call 911 when parents have not harmed them, in order to get something they want. Parents should know the laws and tell children that they can get into trouble for making false reports.

Prepared to Learn

Children who have daily routines, consistent discipline, family meals, and are shown attention are happier and better able to learn in school.

Schools

Schools expect parents to be involved in their children's education. Parents meet with teachers a few times each school year.

In meetings with teachers or other school workers, ask for an interpreter if needed. Never use a child as an interpreter.

Parents may be asked to volunteer at the school or donate certain things. This is voluntary.

After School

Every day after school:

Ask children about their school day ("What was the best/worst thing about school today? What made you laugh today? Who did you play with and why?")

Help them complete homework.

Check for notices sent home from school.

Supervise and set limits on TV, video games, and computer use.

Schools and community centers often have after-school activities for children.

Junk Food

After school, limit snacks and encourage children to eat healthy foods such as fruits. Do not let children eat many cookies, chips, or candy and limit sodas.

Eating Together

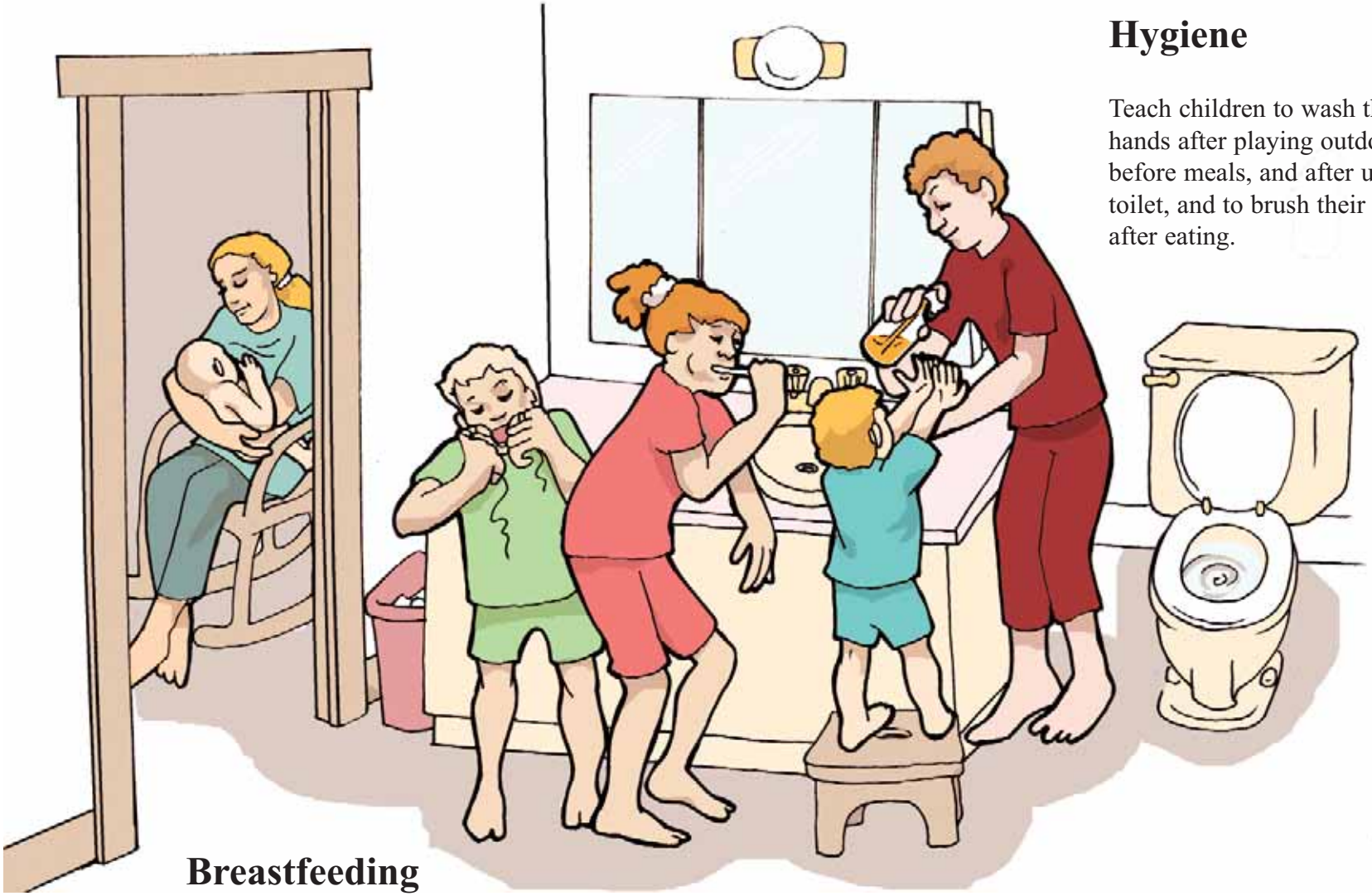
It is important for families to eat meals together. Sharing at least one meal each day can help make families strong, and can give time to enjoy cultural foods and traditions together.

Household Chores

Share household responsibilities. For example, everyone can help to set the table and clean up after meals.

Children often have household "chores," but their job is to help their parents, not to be fully responsible.

Some families reward children for completing their chores by giving them a small money "allowance," or by letting them do some activity they enjoy.

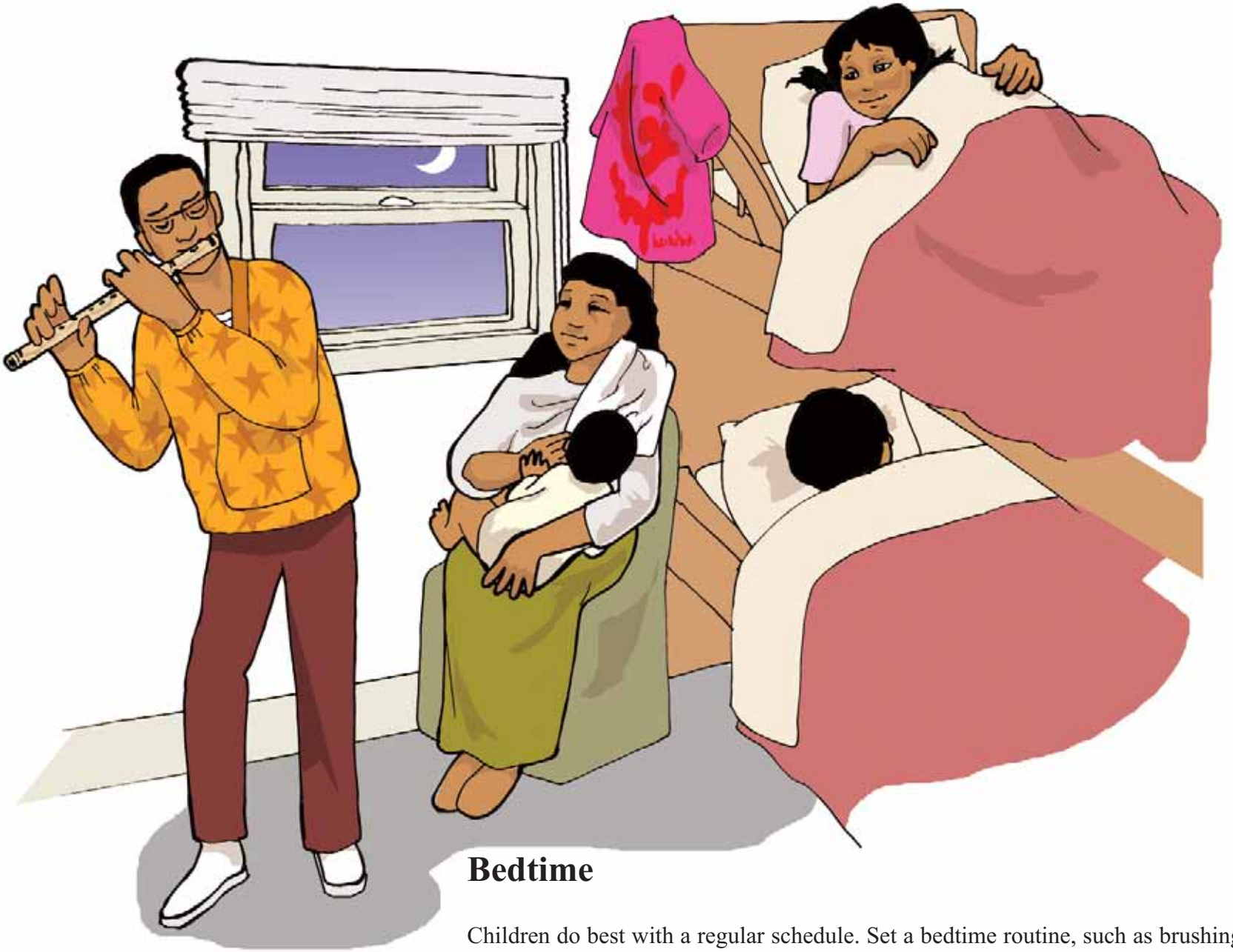


Hygiene

Teach children to wash their hands after playing outdoors, before meals, and after using the toilet, and to brush their teeth after eating.

Breastfeeding

Breast milk is best for babies. When American mothers nurse in public, they often cover themselves with a blanket or go into another room to nurse their babies.



Bedtime

Children do best with a regular schedule. Set a bedtime routine, such as brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, reading a story or singing before bed, and getting to sleep at the same time each night. This can be a good time to share positive memories, stories, or songs from your culture with children.

Parenting in a New Country: Summary

Parenting in a New Country: Summary

References:

Page 2:
For a summary of state compulsory attendance school ages, see:
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d05/tables/dt05_147.asp?referer=list

Page 3:
For "Healthy Eating, Healthy Living Flip Chart" by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, see:
http://www.refugees.org/article.aspx?id=1818
For "Healthy Children, Healthy Choices" from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, see:
http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/nutrition/nutrition_for_everyone/quick_tips/healthy_children.htm
For the food pyramid of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, see: **http://www.nalusda.gov/fnic/Fpyr/pyramid.gif**

Page 4:
For "Crossing the Street", from the Univeristy of Pittsburgh, see:
http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/publications/parentingguides/CrossingTheStreet.pdf

Page 5:
For "Road Wise: A Complete Traffic Safety Program Toolkit" including "Leaving Children Unattended in Cars" and other topics, from the Texas Cooperative Extension, see: **http://fcs.tamu.edu/safety/passenger_safety/toolkit/youth_traffic_safety.php**

Page 6:
For a "Summary of Vehicle Occupant Protection Laws" by state, see:
http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/airbags/VehOccProtectionLaws.pdf
For state child restraint laws, see: **http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/airbags/OccupantProtectionFacts/appendixc.htm**
For state booster seat requirements, see: **http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/BoosterSeatLaws_OverviewMaps07.pdf**
For NHTSA materials in Spanish on Child Passenger Safety, see: **http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/CPS-espanol.html**

Page 8:
For more supervision and babysitting resources, see: **http://www.nccic.org/poptopics/homealone.html**
For "Preparing Children to Stay Alone" from the IL Department of Children and Family Services, see:
http://www.state.il.us/DCFS/library/com_communications_sumlicen_prepare.shtml

References, continued:

Page 9:
The Web site of "Parents. The Anti-Drug" has information in Spanish, Chinese, Filipino, Korean and Vietnamese.
http://www.theantidrug.com/

Page 10:
For resources and research on positive cross-cultural attachment practices, see: **www.attachmentacrosscultures.org**

Page 11:
For information on mandated reporters, see "Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect":
http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm

For "Positive Discipline" from the University of MN Extension Service, available in English, Hmong, Somali or Spanish (click on appropriate language, then "See a PDF of this publication"):
http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7461.html; and "Children and Discipline: A Parent's Guide" available in fifteen languages, from the Canadian Mental Health Association:
http://www.cmha-edmonton.ab.ca/bins/content_page.asp?cid=284-1189-1690-1750&lang=1

Page 15:
For a description of the "New Americans and Child Protection" project in St. Louis, MO, see:
http://www.brycs.org/brycs_spotnov2006.htm

For "A Family's Guide to the Child Welfare System," by the Child Welfare League of America, see:
http://www.cwla.org/childwelfare/fg.pdf

References, continued:

Page 19:
For materials in Spanish on "Effective Parent-Teacher Communication" from the Center for Effective Parenting see:
http://www.parenting-ed.org/Spanish%20handouts/Effective%20Parent-Teacher%20Communication%20-span.doc

Page 20:
For materials in Spanish on "Homework: How to Motivate Your Child" from the Center for Effective Parenting, see: **http://www.parenting-ed.org/Spanish%20handouts/Homework-%20How%20to%20motivate%20your%20child.doc**
For recommendations on Internet and media use with children, see the American Academy of Pediatrics:
http://www.aap.org/healthtopics/mediause.cfm
For "A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety" from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, see:
http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm

For Federal Trade Commission fact sheets on "Social Networking Sites: A Parent's Guide:"
http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec13.pdf; and "Social Networking Sites: Tips for Tweens and Teens:"
http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec14.pdf
For English and Spanish resources on Internet safety, developed by the North East Independent School District in San Antonio, TX, see:
http://www.neisd.net/safety/internet/

Page 24:
For "Breastfeeding" and "Breast pumping" information in English, Hmong and Spanish, from the Children's Hospitals and Clinics of MN, see: **http://www.childrensmn.org/Manuals/PFS/Alphabetical.asp#PFSDocListB**
For "Breastfeeding" and other resources in Somali, from the MN Department of Health, see:
http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/wic/nutrition/somalipdf/somali.html#breastfeeding
For breastfeeding resources in Chinese, Italian, Russian and Spanish and other languages, see: **http://www.llli.org/**
For breastfeeding resources in Vietnamese and English, see: **http://nutrition.berkeley.edu/extension/vietnamese.html**
For "Breastfeeding Your Baby" in Arabic, from UNICEF, see: **http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk/pdfs/arabic/bfyb_arabic2.pdf**

BRYCS Resources:

BRYCS Toolkits:

- Child Care
  http://www.brycs.org/documents/EnhancingChildCare.pdf
- Child Welfare
  http://www.brycs.org/documents/CWToolkit.pdf
- Parenting
  http://www.brycs.org/documents/raisingchildreninanewcountry_web.pdf
- Positive Youth Development
  http://www.brycs.org/documents/GrowingUpInANewCountry-Web.pdf

Spotlight Articles and Lists of Highlighted Resources (organized by topic):
http://www.brycs.org/brycs_archive.htm

Promising Practices for Refugee Serving Programs:
http://www.brycs.org/brycs_archive.htm#PPRACTICES

Refugee Parent Interviews:
http://www.brycs.org/brycs_archive.htm#INTERVIEWS

Targeted Resources (organized by type of professional and includes educational materials for parents):
http://www.brycs.org/brycs_topics.htm

Publications in Alphabetical Order:
http://www.brycs.org/brycs_resources.htm

Acknowledgments

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Last but not least, BRYCS acknowledges refugee and immigrant parents for their courageous journeys, the many gifts they bring, and their commitment to the extraordinary challenge of raising children in a new country; we have a great deal to learn from each other.