Recent events in Colorado have put parents on guard about child safety issues.

10-year-old Jessica Ridgeway was abducted Oct. 5 on her way to school from her home in Westminster, and two other incidences in Merino and Haxtun have been reported in the last week.

Last Thursday, Oct. 11, a suspicious vehicle was seen driving past Holyoke Elementary School. Holyoke Police Department was notified, and they confirmed the driver of the vehicle was cleared of any wrongdoing.

Thankfully nothing happened, but Holyoke Elementary School still took the opportunity to remind the students and parents of safe practices.

In a letter sent home with students, Principal Kyle Stumpf was happy to report all staff and local law enforcement followed protocols and procedure flawlessly.

“Procedures work,” said Superintendent Bret Miles, noting how staff used information from other school districts quickly and efficiently to make sure the scenario in Holyoke was not a threat to students.

Stumpf said it gives him a lot of reassurance to know everybody will be able to handle an emergency. “This ended on a positive note.”

Parents are urged to talk with their children about safety. Considering the events of the past couple weeks, now is the time for increased awareness and education so that when something does happen, children, parents and community members will be prepared.

“Holyoke is a safe little town, but things can happen here just like anywhere else,” said Police

Chief Doug Bergstrom.

He reminds children to walk in groups instead of alone. They should be aware of their surroundings and aware if someone is following them. If children are suspicious of anything, they should immediately tell an adult.

Families should determine “safe words” that are used if someone other than the parent is picking up a child from school, a secret password of sorts so the child knows they can trust that person.

Last Thursday, elementary counselor Sharon Jones spoke with the students.

Earlier in the year she taught them about personal space bubbles, so she reviewed with them how big these bubbles are in certain situations and what to do if a stranger enters that bubble.

Children should never approach a strange or unknown vehicle, and if a stranger approaches them, they should run and scream in the opposite direction the vehicle is headed.

They should tell an adult if someone is knocking to get into the school, and children should never open the door at home unless they are 100 percent sure who is on the other side.

“I told them if they are ever scared or unsure of something they see while at school, to immediately tell an adult,” said Jones. “I reminded them that they are safe because the students’ safety is the number one priority for all adults in the elementary school building.”

Child Safety Tips

In light of recent events, parents are encouraged to review with their children the following safety tips.

Children should...

1. **Walk to school, to the park, downtown or home from school in groups of two or more, and if they have an adult, that's even better.**
2. **Be aware of their surroundings and watch for people following them.**
3. **Immediately tell an adult or parent if something suspicious has happened.**
4. **Never approach a strange or unknown vehicle.**
5. **Run and yell if a stranger approaches or enters their personal space bubble. Do not take time to use a cell phone, and don't run in the direction the vehicle is headed.**
6. **Never open a door at school if someone is knocking to get inside.**
7. **Never open a door at home unless they are 100 percent sure who is on the other side.**
8. **Determine a "safe word" to use as a password if someone other than a parent is picking up the child.**

Holyoke Enterprise October 18, 2012