



# Do You Have A Family Password?

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When A Call Home was Not Enough

*An attacker forces a 17-year-old to call her parents for cash - but a "secret code" could have saved her life.*

As parents, a primary concern and responsibility we all share is to keep our children safe. We keep tabs on their whereabouts and on who they are with when they are not in our care. How often do we ask our children to call us? "Call me when you get to your friend's house...call me if you're running late, call me if you need me...." But, what happens when the child does call, but cannot communicate that he is in real trouble? Imagine that there is a perpetrator standing there, threatening the child as she is making the call. That is exactly what happened to 17-year-old Lily Burk.

Lily Burk was abducted in downtown Los Angeles this past summer. Her attacker forced her to call her parents twice to ask how to withdraw money from an ATM using a credit card. Though her parents said she didn't mention she was in trouble, two hours later she was dead. It's a parent's worst nightmare -- how did they not know Lily was in distress? The answer is heartbreakingly deceiving. "You have a kid who's calling you, and called twice - that may have been reassuring," explains former L.A. County Deputy District Attorney "She's where she said she was, doing what she said she was doing." Lily had told her parents she was at an ATM to withdraw money to buy shoes. Instead, she was allegedly at the hands of Charlie Samuel, a 50-year-old transient with a history of violence.



Police say Lily was approached at 3 PM on Friday at her car near Southwestern University School of Law, where she had gone to pick up some exams for her mother, an attorney who worked there. Between 3:35 PM and 4 PM, Lily placed those two calls. Her parents told her to come home - but she never did. They filed a missing person's report at 5:25 PM Friday evening; her body was found Saturday morning. Samuel was arrested for her murder on Sunday.

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Could Lily have signaled to her parents that she was in trouble? We don't know if he was dialing the phone, holding the phone or if he had a weapon. What we do know is that Lily was unable to communicate that she was in trouble.

**One lesson to take from this tragedy is the importance of creating a secret language or code between parents and children. Every family needs to have a code word of "Call the police; I'm in danger, That was the communication opportunity"**

Every family can come up with their own secret password, the important thing to remember is that it must be a word that is not obvious to the perpetrator. **In fact, ATM may be the perfect code word. ATM heists are common, and no one should ever be talking or texting on the phone while using one. Children should make a deal with their parents that they'd never call from an ATM. If they do, it's likely they're in a heist, and the red flag has been raised.**

This is an opportunity for parents to think about how we conduct ourselves. We too need to be completely aware of our surroundings. We need to do this for our own protection and we need to role model safe behaviors for our children. Just like we make sure to cross the street at a crosswalk with our children, our children need to see that we are careful not to use cell phones when this behavior could endanger our safety. One of the things perpetrators look for is people who are distracted. Parents should teach their children to be aware of their environment and to carry themselves confidently. Instruct your children to walk with their shoulders and head up. Give them the message, "If you look confident, they'll move on to the next potential victim." One can never be too cautious. The best option still remains to Bring a Friend, rather than to walk places alone. For younger children, this is a must! For teens and young adults, this is not always practical, and this is where a password can be a true life saver.

But what can be done once the attacker has the upper hand? Aleinu's Safety Kid™ program, teaches that you should "Run, Scream and Make a Scene." Take it one step further by learning self-defense, but at all costs, avoid being alone with an attacker in a car. Once you're in a vehicle with someone, the control and power dynamic changes. Police say Lily, a student at Oakwood School in North Hollywood with dreams of becoming a writer, was beaten to death inside her car.

"The thing we want people to know about Lily is that she was a beautiful person, and that she was looking forward to her life. She was funny, warm, kind, and empathetic. She was deeply and widely loved," reads a statement from her parents.

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