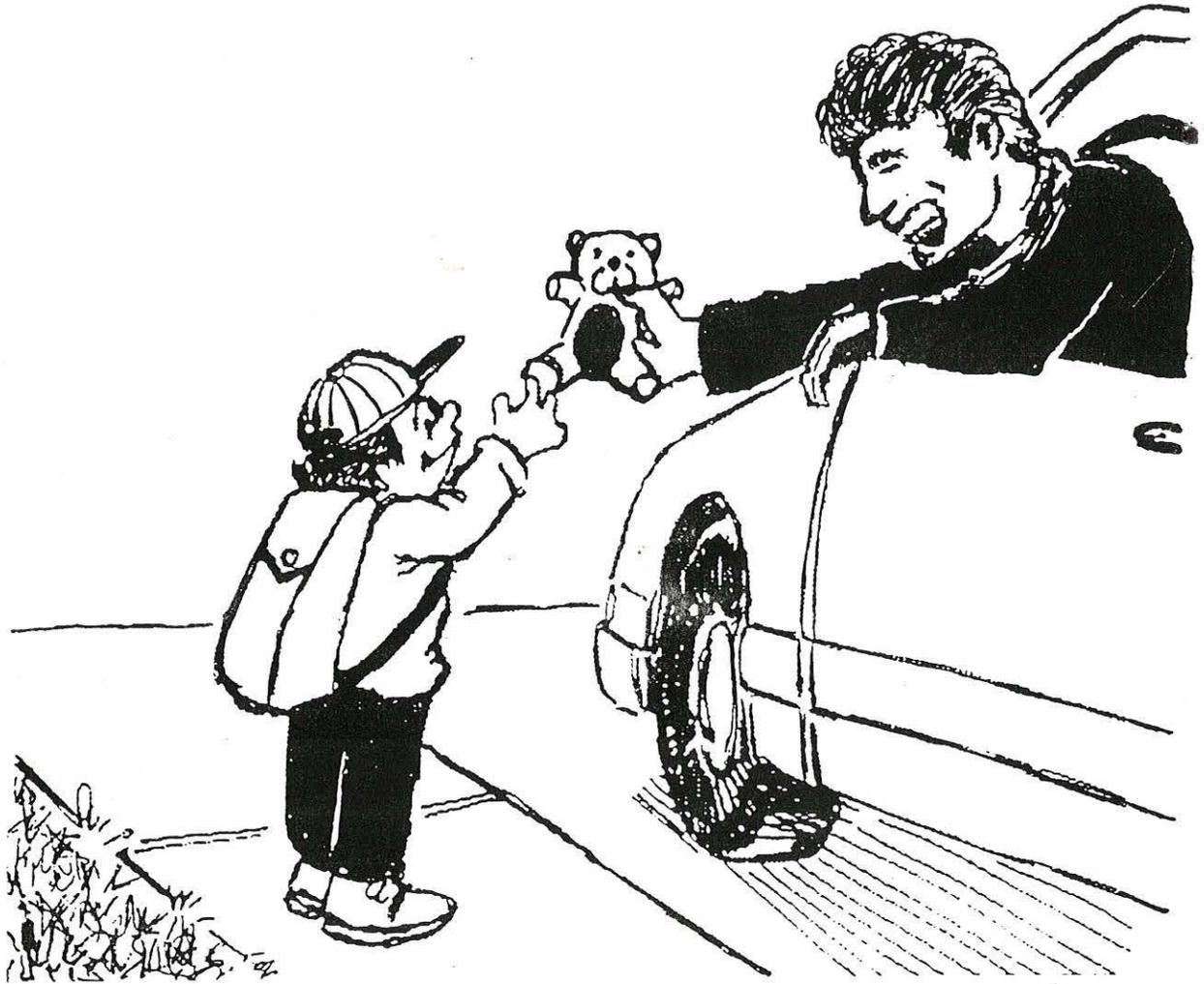


STREET SAFE KIDS

Protecting children from sexual predators – a street-proofing manual



“Street Safe Kids is one of the most comprehensive self-defense and street-proofing courses available. We strongly recommend that parents enroll their children in this ‘hands-on’ program.”

Mabyn Armstrong, director of prevention
The Missing Children’s Network Canada

George J. Manoli



Bullies

To a child, being bullied is a terrible thing. At times being bullied may feel like a life or death situation. Bullying is usually an underground activity, where the disapproved actions are hidden and victims often deny being harassed. Rarely are parents and teachers even aware such bullying activity is taking place. Attacks made by bullies are in general verbal; however, some are physical assaults.

"Debra Pepler, a psychology professor at York University in Toronto, points to a 1991 Norwegian study that showed 60 percent of boys who'd been identified by their peers as bullies in Grades six to nine had at least one court conviction by age 24. As well, she says, bullying can be evidence of an anti-social attitude that may predict adult problems like spousal abuse and alcoholism." (Today's Parent Magazine, Oct. 1996).

Bullying, a type of violence or intimidation (emotional or physical abuse with an intent to injure or hurt), is very much a reality for today's children and they should be adequately prepared for it. Children who are bullied are very embarrassed about the terrorizing situations they constantly face, they fear adults won't take their complaint seriously and that, even if they do believe them, they can't do anything about it.

Why do kids bully ? There are several reasons why children act like bullies. It is believed that kids bully other children due to low self-esteem. They are physically and verbally aggressive and have a need to control, dominate, or belittle others to bolster or raise their own low self-images. Both boys and girls bully, but boys rely more on physical aggression to get their point across, while girls are more apt to gossip, manipulate and exclude the targeted child.

Physical attacks are not necessarily provoked by the targeted child, but probably follow a series of verbal attacks. At times, bullies are acting out family violence which they live out on a daily basis at home (i.e., a family member using power and aggression together to get what they want: name-calling, put-downs and physical violence). They may be victims themselves and are bullying others as a symptom of their own pain and misery. They may be also participating in bullying activities that have been initiated by another child.

If your child can understand why another child is turning to bullying, it can sometimes help the victimized child cope with the stressful situation. Your child can then see the bully in a different light, as a less omnipotent (infinite power) and threatening figure - just another youngster with problems.

"If your child can see the bully as someone whose parents are getting divorced or who has a big brother who beats him up regularly at home, you are taking the bully off the pedestal of awe where the child has placed him. Your child may then feel stronger in relationship to that youngster because he or she sees the bully himself as victim in another setting."
(*How To Raise A Street Smart Child*, Hechinger, 1985).



Signs and symptoms of being bullied : As parents, we must look for the signs that our child is being bullied: torn clothes, lost personal items or toys, not wanting to go to school or suddenly disliking school, attitude changes, complaints of headaches, stomach aches, anxiety, depression or a combination of such things.

If your child admits to being bullied : You need to follow up on the menacing circumstance as soon as possible (make an appointment after school with the principal and classroom teacher). Keep a watchful eye on how your child behaves after the episode. Don't let a show of bravado fool you in any way. You can help your child in several ways. Be supportive, when your child comes home and tells you he had a run-in with the class bully. Don't brush off the incident as trivial, especially when dealing with younger children. Confidence to deal with bullies comes only with experience. By minimizing an experience, you run a good chance of hampering the development of your child's self-confidence.

"Children may feel great about how they handled a particular situation. But they may have been terrified underneath. You can reduce this anxiety and make it all right for them to acknowledge their fears if you say, for example, "If that happened to me, I would have been afraid." And don't forget your praise for handling the situation well." (*How To Raise*, Hechinger, 85).

Make it easy for your child to tell you what is going on. Instead of the general "How was your day?" be more specific. Ask your child "Who did you play with?" or "How are you getting along with your friends?" You may want to tell them about a bullying situation you once encountered. Avoid over-dramatization of the story so that you don't scare the child and reawaken fears. If your child seems to be overwhelmed by the bullying experience, try to put things into perspective. Try to come up with specific, realistic, attainable ways to solve the problem in order to calm down some of your child's fears. Then you can also reassure your child that they have the ability to carry out the plans successfully.

The anxieties and discomfort your child might be feeling will be reduced if you adopt a positive, confident, down-to-earth attitude. Explain to your child that certain solutions may work in one situation but not in others. That is why you need several alternatives in your plan. By working together you will find an ideal solution.

Fight or flight will depend on both you and your child's attitude as well as the plan you have devised together to face the problem at hand. It's natural for parents to want to protect their children from having bad experiences, but they must realize that there are limits to what they can do.

"No matter how difficult it may be for us to understand this, the recognition that every frightening experience children can surmount, including being bullied or threatened, will ultimately help them to become more confident and independent, which in turn will improve their capacity to deal with whatever happens to them."(How To Raise A Street Smart Child, Hechinger, 1985).

If your child is being bullied : Parents should go over the alternatives and options available in dealing with bullies like telling a teacher or trusted adult, walking away, giving the bully what they want, running home or for help, calling out for help or causing a commotion, staying and physically defending oneself. Defending oneself should be a last resort. Emphasis should be placed on using physical and verbal assertiveness when dealing with bullies. *Mr. Manoli offers a 2-3 hour one-on-one bully-proof workshop for parents and their children who are having trouble handling and dealing with bullies.* Vancouver conflict resolution consultant Paula Temrick suggests the following:

1. Encourage your child to come up with a few strong lines that neither challenge nor threaten the bully, but state clearly that he won't put up with being picked on.
2. Try to ensure that your child has interests and at least one special friend of his own, to boost self-esteem and a sense of belonging.
3. Find out what your child is being incessantly taunted about.
4. Teach your child a series of strategies that are non-threatening yet assertive. The first might be a 'limit setting statement': "Janet, that's a put-down. Stop it!" The second is an "I" statement: "Janet, I don't listen when I'm being put down." And the third names the consequences of continuing: "Janet, when I'm being picked on, I walk away, I don't play."
5. If the child has tried three assertive statements and the bullying continues, or she still feels unsafe, teach her to walk away and ignore the other child, or go get help (from an adult). Kids should know they don't have to deal with bullying on their own.