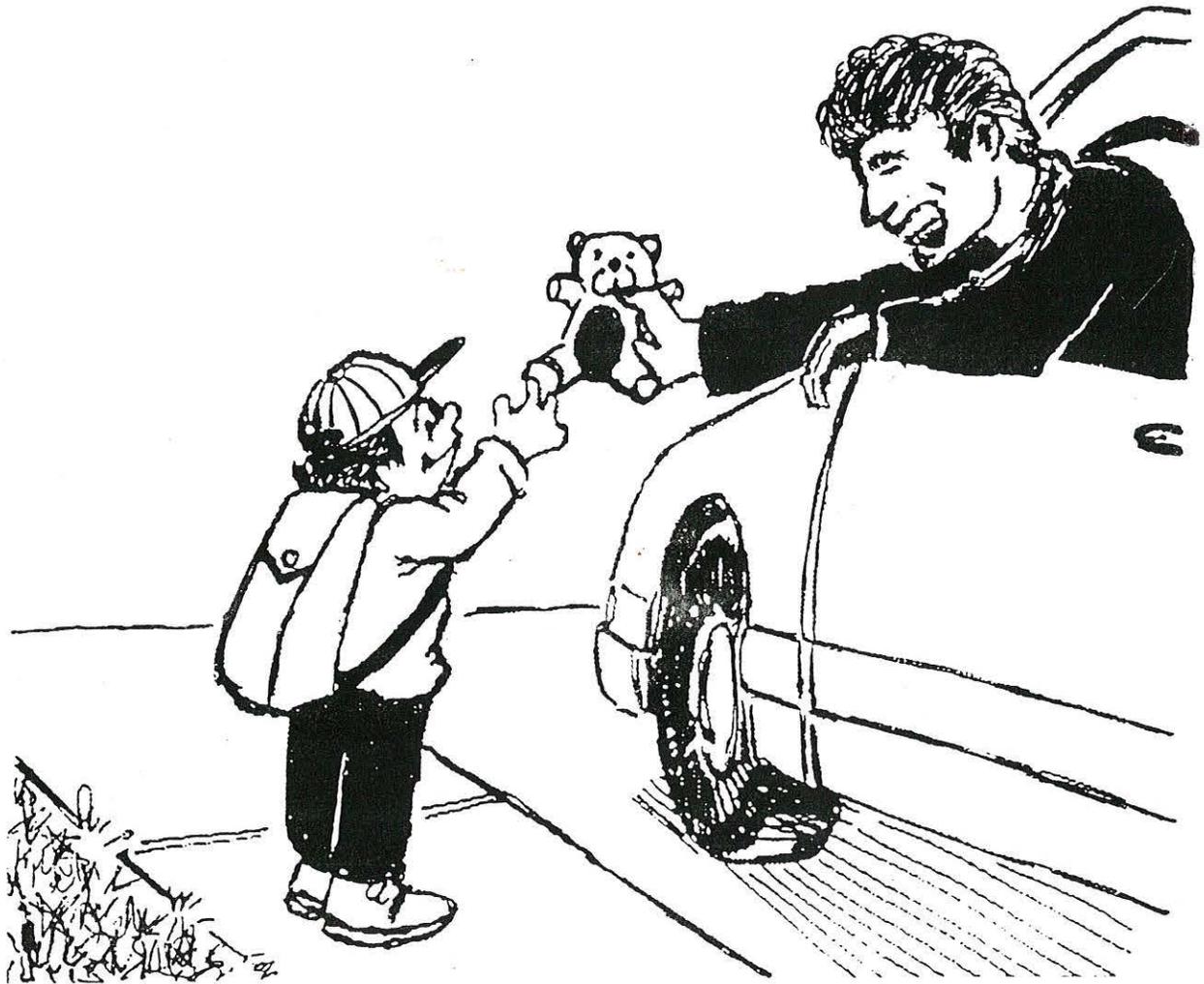


STREET SAFE KIDS

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

15. NEVER BLINDLY OBEY ADULTS - YOU CAN SAY 'NO'

We mistakenly teach our children to respect and blindly obey adults. Many child molesters take advantage of that respect and obedience by using their authoritative adult position to disarm and seduce children. Have you taught your child that their rights count and that ultimately they have to trust their own instincts in order to judge a questionable situation they might be facing?

Children should be instructed to never blindly obey adults. They should know that they can say 'No!' to an adult in order to keep themselves safe if they feel uneasy, scared, or if they are not sure what to do in any situation. If your child's personal safety is jeopardized they should not have to worry about offending the adult's feelings. Your child should understand that their personal safety is more important than being thoughtful and willing.

When saying 'No!' to the engaging adult or teenager, your child should keep their distance, stand straight and tall looking at the person they are dealing with, and use a serious "I mean business" facial expression when saying in a loud confident voice such things as: "No!," "Leave me alone!," "Stop it!," "Don't do that!," "Go away!," etc. Once they verbally express themselves, they should then proceed to leave the situation as soon as possible looking for a safe haven or a trusted adult.

"Speak in short, sharp commands. A person who is in crisis, in an emotionally unbalanced state, angry, or on an adrenaline high can only understand and remember sentences that contain about five simple words. Teach your child the rule of five - to use short sentences with only about five words and words with no more than five or six letters - for example, "I want you to stop." "You should stop right now." "Stop doing that." "Don't come any closer." These sentences clearly state the child's desires in relationship to the assailant." (Protecting Children From Danger, B. Bishop & M. Thomas, 1993)



Your family safety plan: You should advise your child that a troubled child will approach an adult for assistance and help and not the other way around. Your child must understand, recognize, and act on that difference. When faced with a questionable situation they are to: (1) 'Check first' with a trusted adult. (2) Ask themselves the 3 street safe questions prior to going or doing anything with anyone: (a) Do I have a 'yes' or 'no' feeling about the situation? (b) Does an adult I trust know where I am and what I'm doing? (c) If I go or do what is asked of me, can I get help if I need it? If the answer to any one of these 3 questions is 'NO!,' then the child should not do what is being asked of them. (3) Quickly make a decision on the questionable situation, then take action by making the encounter as brief as possible, saying 'No!,' (or any other expression which will help them assert themselves), then seek a safe haven.

15. Never blindly obey adults - you can say 'No!'

Parent/child activity #1 - Learning to say 'No' : We must teach our children to exercise their own authority, to know which adults to question and who to say 'No!' to. Start with two children (or adult and child) facing each other in pairs. Have one say 'Yes!' while the other says 'No!' Go back and forth (yes/no) with increasing volume and energy. After about half a minute, have children switch roles. Alternate the 'Yes!' players, encouraging them to be verbally forceful with the 'No!' child. The child continues to say 'No!' or other assertive responses they feel comfortable with. **Reminder** : Try to develop an assertive body language that goes with the forceful 'No!'

Parent / child activity #2 - Learning different ways to say 'no' : (1) Teach your child a variety of expressions they can use instead of 'No!' in order to help them disconnect and assert themselves from an engaging stranger. The variety of expressions you select must be age appropriate and match your child's character and personality. Some examples : "Leave me alone!", "Stop it!", "Don't do that!", "Go away!," "I want you to stop." "You should stop right now." "Stop doing that." "Don't come any closer." **Reminder** : Try to develop an assertive body language that goes with the forceful 'No!' (refer to p. 76 for further details).

16. CHECK FIRST

"I'll check with my parents first" - The 'check first' rule is an excellent habit for children to have in order to ask permission when they want to go anywhere or if they change plans. Children who consistently 'check first' before going somewhere or doing something are less likely to make choices that put them in any kind of danger.



"Too often, very young children are expected to have mastered common-sense decision-making, and they are asked to make decisions they are not ready to make. Children can learn to make good judgments through role-modeling, experience, and maturation. The 'check first' habit places the burden of decision-making on adults, giving young children time to grow in confidence and competence." (Kids And Company, Together For Safety, Teachers Guide).

Children should also know where they can reach you at anytime and that they can call you if they ever need a ride home or a helping hand. As stated earlier, parents should teach by example, therefore, you should also inform your child if you have a change of itinerary and where you can be reached.

Parent/child activity - Check first : Ask your child to identify a variety of situations where it is important for them to check with you first before going anywhere or do anything. Create situations by using the 'What if...? game' (refer to p. 106 for suggestions). Require specific information from your child: Where? With whom?, etc.

17. KNOW WHO AND HOW TO APPROACH FOR HELP

Telling your child to never talk to strangers is asking for trouble. If your child gets kidnapped, who is going to help them? Chances are, they will have to approach a safe stranger for help in order to save their life. We have to teach our children that there are good strangers as well as bad ones. Safe strangers should include a grandparent or mother with their children, a fireman, a store clerk, a police officer, a mailman, etc.

"Teaching your child to link up with the good guys and to get the help she needs, whether it's just information or assistance in finding you, or real help in times of danger. Asking for help has four components: who, where, what, and when. You can't expect young children to "just ask anyone for help." They may be too shy or afraid to do so, and they often lack the ability to discriminate between people who would be helpful and those who might do them harm. Take them to various public places and point out where there are people they can safely approach, even though they are strangers. People behind counters in stores or at checkout stands in supermarkets are usually safe bets. So are people in uniforms, especially police officers or security guards with holstered guns. Teach your children that if they are lost or in trouble they should look for someone to help as soon as possible and not to wait until things get worse or they are panicking to seek assistance." (Protecting Children From Danger, B. Bishop & M. Thomas, 1993).



During an abduction, the only stranger who is bad for the child, is the abductor. Everyone else is a possible rescuer and a friend. Rather than qualifying everyone the child does not know as dangerous and not to be talked to or approached, children need to learn how to make safe decisions about approaching the right kind of stranger for help in an emergency.

Children should clearly understand the difference between a distressed child approaching a stranger for help and a stranger approaching an unattended, non-distressed child for assistance. A child should also understand that breaking free from the abductor is half the battle. Finding a safe place and summoning help is the other half. Keep in mind that the longer and harder the abductor has to pursue the child, the angrier they will become. If the child is caught, they most likely will not get a second chance to escape. Therefore, when fleeing, and especially when summoning help, a child should do it aggressively. In abduction situations shyness and politeness are a child's worst enemies.

After getting away, as your child approaches the 'safe stranger' for assistance, they should grab onto the 'safe stranger' and not let go, informing them of the following: (a) What is the problem? Repeating loudly - "Help me, I've been kidnapped." (b) What kind of assistance they require from the 'safe stranger.' (c) How they feel about the situation.

17. Know who and how to approach for help

The 'safe stranger' on the other hand should: (a) Listen to the child. (b) Believe and reassure the child. (c) Assist the child and summon help. (d) Affirm whatever feeling the child has. Reminder : Your child should be instructed to never leave the public area with the 'safe stranger' they have approached.

If your child can't get help from a 'safe stranger' in a public place, they can run through the place pulling and throwing merchandise off the shelves, yelling "Help me, I've been kidnapped," till someone restrains them. Other effective means a child can use to draw attention if seized by the abductor, is to grab onto solid items in the public area they are located, (i.e., chairs, tables, cash register, etc.), and yell "Help me, I've been kidnapped."

On the street, if the child is able to get away from the abductor they should run into and against the direction of pedestrians. The crowd will act as a natural obstacle for the abductor giving chase. The child can also move more easily and faster than most abductors in this environment. If there is no crowd, running in the opposite direction of traffic can be effective, especially at night. The lights from the cars makes it harder for the pursuer to see. In the daytime, running against traffic allows the faces of the abductor and child to be seen by the drivers.

Parent/child activity #1 - Pointing out safe strangers : Take the opportunity when you are out, to point out helpful people (safe strangers) in the community to your child. When starting this process, begin with people the child knows or who know the child, then proceed to people the child does not know at all, like a security guard, a family walking, a mailman, a movie usher, a store clerk, a parking attendant, a police officer, a Block Parent, etc. The fact of pointing out some safe strangers who can help children means that you are not training your child to be distrustful and paranoid of people at all times. Your goal is to help develop judgment, which of course is a lifelong process.

Parent/child activity #2 - Landmarks : While out and about with your child(ren), practice the awareness of landmarks, buildings, monuments and other notable structures that could help orient your child to their location if lost.

Parent/child activity #3 - Police officers and cruisers : (a) When driving with your child, see how many police cars or vans they can spot. Be sure to explain the difference when they mistake a taxi or some other security or service vehicle for a patrol car. (b) When you see someone in uniform, ask your child if they think it is a police officer. If the person isn't, explain why. Usually the most distinctive characteristic of police officers is that they carry a holstered gun and walkie-talkie. That is easy for small children to understand. (c) Visit your local police station with your children. Get your child to talk to police officers (both men and women), sit in their cruiser, ask them questions, etc. Observe closely how your child responds.



18. BE A TOUGH TARGET

Tough targets don't get selected. It begins in the mind, in the heart, and in our attitude. It also begins when parents make their children aware of their rights and promote their self-esteem and life-saving attitudes. Knowledge is the key to self protection.

"Predators seek the weak and avoid the strong - not only the physically strong but the mentally strong. They seek the easiest prey to ensure success." (Defensive Living, Bo Hardy, 1992).

The following are some of the life-saving attitudes which have helped children be tough targets and stay safe:

A. Self confidence : don't think or look like a victim

Do you and your family members project a self-assured, confident personality? Assailants look for someone who appears timid, easily scared and looks like a victim because they believe such a person also thinks like a victim. To look confident, you must feel confident. An assertive, confident child speaks with definite conviction, leaving no doubt as to his or her feelings or intentions. Such an outward appearance of 'walking confidently tall' can serve as a protective armor for any child.

By nurturing and promoting your child's self-esteem you will automatically boost their self-confidence which in turn will greatly affect other areas in your child's welfare such as handling peer pressure to smoke or do drugs or adhering to local gangs or bullying other children. "Once a child experiences the power to keep themselves safe, it affects other areas of their life...Children who have had a sense of their power, and who have been taught to think for themselves, are the safest children of all."

Self-confidence mixed with strong self-esteem are a child's best defensive strategies in staying safe. Even though one does not feel assertive, acting confident and staying calm and focused can sometimes fool a potential assailant.

B. Assertiveness - physical and verbal

Physical assertiveness : This self-assured attitude that we recommend can be portrayed in nearly every outward physical act the child does. Like walking purposefully (using a medium bouncy stride instead of small quick steps), talking (a commanding voice, speaking in a direct, confident way with stern or serious facial expressions), standing, or even sitting. The way a child keeps their body erect

18. Be a tough target

(shoulders back and chin held high), the way their eyes watch intently (direct eye contact with people) rather than gaze inattentively, using hand gestures, etc., are types of body language messages that are easily read by potential assailants and will often make a bully or an adult attacker turn and leave. Without the use of self defense techniques, everyone's body language "speaks" for itself and relays its thoughts and feelings in a forceful way to others. Body language tells a story about your child and may prevent an attack from ever happening.

Verbal assertiveness : Assertive verbal responses often prevent a physical attack from taking place. The child should:

1. Look at the person if possible. Sit or stand straight and tall.
2. Use an "I mean business" facial expression (looking serious or angry).
3. With a loud, confident lion's voice they would say such things as: "No!", "Leave me alone!", "Stop it!", "Don't do that!", "Go away!"
4. Leave the situation as soon as possible. Seek a safe haven or a trusted adult.
5. State the problem to a trusted adult as soon as possible.

C. A strong will

The desire or determination towards a particular end or goal can at times surpass the patience or the will of the parent. A strong will is a powerful tool, which has been proven to be extremely useful when dealing with high stress situations. At times this "strong will to survive," or "to find a way out, no matter what," were the key factors that got certain kids out of dangerous predicaments. This cast iron will can prevent someone else from imposing their will on your child. "This willfulness can be transformed into a resolute determination that may be the deciding factor as to whether or not your child remains safe and sound in the future."

D. Self-control - Keep a clear mind

If a child feels frightened for any reason, they should try to stay calm, focusing on using their personal safety skills to handle and get out of the situation as safely as possible. Keeping a clear mind and using one's wits is crucial during an attack situation. By keeping a clear mind, this will enable the would-be victim to think, make choices and react in spite of the fear. A clear mind will enable a child to make good decisions under extremely stressful circumstances. If the would-be victim's mind is clear and calm (at peace with oneself), then the body will execute whatever is required without much hesitation. If a child panics, the mind goes blank or gets all mixed up and all wise and sensible thought seems to vanish. Knowledge and planning ahead (having a plan and realizing that it can happen to you), helps to prevent panic.

E. A self-protective attitude

Prior to deciding to fight back, it is important for all of us to learn to assess a situation and respond with safety uppermost in our minds. Most of us (including our children), feel we have the right to fight for our possessions. The problem arises when we try to weigh the odds in a particular situation, whether we stand a chance in fighting back or the fight looks uneven and risky. In making our decision, the bottom line is a question of judgment and not a question of right and wrong.

We should avoid making the mistake of teaching our kids that it is always wrong to fight for possessions (physical property). We should advise them to fight for their possessions as long as it is an equal fight, but not to foolishly fight for physical property which they stand to lose anyway because the situation itself is dangerous or the odds are stacked against them. So in essence, we are not saying to surrender everything you have to anyone you see, we are teaching them to fight back only when they have a fair chance. The idea is to use your head and size up the situation before you fight. Kids as well as most adults know whom they can fight and whom they can't. If your child decides to fight back, they should have a guaranteed plan of escape prior to using physical violence. Surprise, speed and striking instant pain areas (eyes, nose, groin), are essential elements when fighting back seems to be the only alternative.

19. NEVER BELIEVE THE ATTACKER'S PROMISES

Children should understand that the assailant will be at first very nice, subtle, engaging and non-violent. These deceitful individuals frequently use a seduction or luring process that involves bribery, threats, lies, flattery, and much needed attention, rather than physical force. These creative lures are skillfully designed to confuse a child's natural instincts, drawing them into a trap that generally begins with a seemingly harmless request.

Review and discuss with your child : (a) The various lures and preventative tips are presented on p. 25 in this manual. (b) The type of believable lies a potential abductor would use before, during and after the event. (c) The methods of seduction used by pedophiles to control someone (see p. 19). (d) The idea of never keeping 'touching secrets' a secret (see p. 64). (e) Play together the 'What if...?' role-playing game and other activities that stimulate conversation and safety skills (see p. 106). See how your child handles the encounter when you apply some of these lures and lies. Make these discussions compatible with your child's emotional and intellectual levels.