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Empowering Children to Thwart Abductors  
By JANE E. BRODY

I was 13 and walking home from school on a residential street when a car pulled over to the curb next to me. The driver, a man of about 45, leaned over and opened the passenger door and called out to me: "I dropped my keys and can't seem to find them. Can you please help me?"

Without responding, I ran up to the nearest house and rang the doorbell. The man closed the car door and drove off. Shaken, I began to wonder what might have happened if no house had been nearby. Would he have gotten out of the car and chased me? What would I have done? What could I have done?

Each year, the Department of Justice reports, about 69,000 children are abducted, 12,000 of them by people who are not family members. In nearly two-thirds of these abductions, the kidnapper is not a stranger to the child. Yet, beyond warning children not to talk to strangers or to go anywhere with people they do not know, and perhaps cautioning them to avoid deserted streets and unpopulated shortcuts, few youngsters are prepared to prevent an abduction or escape from one.

After Paul Stanley of Chicago, saw his 6-year-old son walk off with a stranger who asked for help in looking for his lost puppy in a park, Mr. Stanley decided that something had to be done to "give kids a fighting chance."

"Somewhere between 'don't talk to strangers' and placing a child's photo on a 'missing' poster, there exists a painful gap," said Mr. Stanley, who fortunately was able to wrest his son from the stranger. "We've never empowered the child. What better gift can you give a child than skills to save his or her life? Specifically, how to get away if they are ever grabbed or compromised by an aggressor."

The result is an organization, Fighting Chance, and a video and DVD called "Give Your Kids a Fighting Chance," which teaches children from 5 to 18 how to escape from an attacker.

Dr. Arthur H. Brand, a consultant for Fighting Chance, who is a child psychologist in Boca Raton, Fla., says parents should not be concerned that discussing abduction and teaching escape techniques will unduly frighten children.

Rather, he says, teaching children how to rescue themselves is empowering and anxiety-reducing.

## Learning Self-Defense

With two experienced self-defense instructors, Rick Seid and Guy Dar, and several youngsters, the Fighting Chance video teaches and demonstrates strikes, kicks, bites, foot stomps, pushes and other techniques that can enable a child to stun an attacker temporarily and escape.

The tactics can make it possible for even a 5-year-old to get away from a full-grown man. For example, a child may be able to use her fingertips to strike a man in his eyes and follow that with kicks to the groin.

If a child's mouth is being held shut, sometimes the man's fingers can be bitten hard. Or, if the child is being held with a rear bear hug, a head butt followed by a hand strike to the groin or a stomp on the top of the foot could give the child an opportunity to escape. Then, if the child cannot outrun an aggressor, it may be possible to avoid being captured by ducking under a parked car.

Other tips include ways to avoid being shoved into a car or, if trapped in a car, how to disable the driver or the vehicle, causing an accident that would attract attention. Or, if abducted into a car, the child should try to jump into the back seat and escape through a back door. A child who is locked in a trunk should push out the taillights so that the wires hang outside the car.

Tell children that if they are ever abducted, they should never stop fighting and looking for ways to escape. Several months ago, a 7-year-old girl was rescued after being tied up in a basement with duct tape over her mouth. She chewed through the tape, broke a window and called out for help.

The Fighting Chance video instructs parents to practice the techniques with their children and to review them often.

Children are not the only ones who can benefit from these lessons. Adults, too, especially women, are often the victims of carjackers, muggers and other criminals who might be thwarted by these very same self-defense techniques.

## Avoiding Trouble

Of course, safety starts with learning how to recognize dangerous situations and avoid them. At its Web site, [www.kidsfightingchance.com](http://www.kidsfightingchance.com), the organization provides dozens of safety tips for children. Although parents already know to teach many of these to their children, their seemingly obvious nature may result in a failure to mention them.

For example, a young child who is home alone should always keep the doors locked and should not answer the door or open it to a stranger. Nor should a child allow a worker, delivery person or even a police officer into the house, even with an official-looking uniform or credentials.

Neither should children home alone admit that fact to telephone callers. Rather, a child should be taught to lie in this situation, saying something like "My dad is in the shower" or "My mom is busy doing laundry" or "Our housekeeper can't come to the phone right now; she's taking care of the baby" and offer to take a message.

Where children play and walk can either protect or endanger them. Children should be told not to play in isolated areas or inside or near deserted buildings. They should not take shortcuts through alleys or deserted parks. When possible, they should walk with other children. At night, they should walk near lights and stay in populated open areas.

An adult should always accompany a child who goes door to door fund-raising or trick-or-treating, no matter what the time of day. Likewise, a child should be accompanied by an adult or an older child when using a public restroom that has more than one stall.

Children should never go into anyone's car unless a parent says it is O.K. Nor should they agree to help do anything for adults they do not know, including search for lost objects or find addresses. Parents should thoroughly check the references of anyone hired for childcare.

Avoid giving your children clothing, playthings or backpacks that have their names obviously printed on them. Children can easily be fooled into thinking they know someone who calls them by name.

Children should be taught to trust their instincts. If someone frightens them or makes them feel uncomfortable for any reason, they should leave and go immediately to a safe haven. One day when my sons were very young, they saw someone on the street who looked like trouble, and they took refuge in the local Y.M.C.A.

Be sure your child knows his or her full name, address and phone number and knows how to dial 911. If an abductor interrupts a 911 call, the child should try to keep the line open to allow the call to be traced.

Phone numbers of parents at work, responsible neighbors who are usually home and emergency services should be posted near every phone in the house.

The 60-minute Fighting Chance video costs \$29.95 and is sold in stores nationwide and through the organization's Web site or by phone at 1-800-572-7307.