

kid

by Sara Fogan

safe

20 Experts Sound Off on What You Need to Know to Protect Your Children

In *The Deep End of the Ocean*, Michelle Pfeiffer portrays a woman who is devastated when her 3-year-old son disappears while she's distracted in a hotel lobby. Her anguish over the kidnapping is compounded by her husband's recriminating words: "Children don't get lost. People *lose* them!"

Whether a youngster is snatched from her bedroom at night or carried off while playing with a friend in front of her home, it devastates the victim, the victim's family and the community. And all too often, it proves fatal for the child.

Fortunately, there are some simple ways parents can protect their kids, as well as some strategies kids can use to fight back and get help. To learn more about them, *Black Belt* asked 20 self-defense experts—martial arts instructors, reality-fighting specialists and law-enforcement officers—to identify the best ways to keep kids safe. In part one, presented below, those experts address the most important lessons parents can teach their youngsters. In part two, to be published in the December 2002 issue, they will discuss methods older children and teen-agers can use to protect themselves. Note: All the instructors that were consulted offered extensive advice, but their comments have been condensed for the sake of brevity and to avoid repetition.

Victor deThouars

Perhaps the best safety tip for the 21st century is the same advice parents have given their children for generations: Don't talk to strangers. "That's the standard thing for small people," says *pentjak silat soempat* expert Victor deThouars, who lives in Bellflower, California. "It's the most important thing that a child needs to know."

George Dillman

Black Belt Hall of Fame member George Dillman claims all children can



PHOTO BY ROBERT W. YOUNG

they have to," says the Reading, Pennsylvania-based pressure-point expert.

Tony Blauer

It is crucial that children never stop thinking about ways to escape their captor, says Montreal, Canada-based street-fighting expert Tony Blauer. If one plan fails, they must continue to look for another way out, he adds. "The window of opportunity for escape may not be like what conventional self-defense systems teach."

An example of such resilience comes from the 7-year-old Philadelphia girl who recently chewed her way through the duct tape that was binding her hands and broke a window to call for help. "She maintained her wits and said: 'I don't want to be here. I've got to get out,'" Blauer says. "She's my hero because she fought until she got free."

Stephen K. Hayes

Ninjutsu master Stephen K. Hayes says children need to practice both physical and verbal defense skills so they know what to do if a stranger approaches. "The most important thing is for parents to actually practice these kinds of encounters," the *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member says. His list of essential skills includes keeping distance between the child and the stranger, watching the stranger's hands and seizing any opportunity to run away.

Kids also need to learn how to control their voice and which words they should use when they talk to a stranger, adds the Dayton, Ohio-based instructor. "They should practice using these words just like they practice their physical techniques."

Melissa Soalt

Children should not to talk to strangers, but if someone tries to kidnap them, they may have to seek help from an adult they don't know. In that case, *Self Defense for Women* columnist Melissa Soalt advises parents to teach their kids to run to a woman for help. "That's not to say women can't be bad people, but generally a woman will have a very visceral, immediate, empathic, maternal response to a child in trouble," says the Amherst, Massachusetts-based self-defense instructor.

Pat Johnson

Parents need to make their children aware of the risks they face from molesters and kidnapers and mentally prepare them to fight back if necessary, says *tang soo do* expert Pat Johnson. However, many people are reluctant to even begin that kind of discourse with youngsters. "They'd rather shield their children because they worry, 'If I talk to my children about it, they're going to have nightmares,'" he says.

Parents can seek professional advice about how to discuss the risks of being victimized in a way that will not scare the kids, the Canoga Park, California,



Children who have been abducted must never stop trying to escape, says Tony Blauer.

The most important lesson kids need to learn is to not talk to people they don't know, Victor deThouars says.

benefit from martial arts training because all arts teach techniques that can be used in a threatening situation. "The first thing martial arts schools teach children is how to break away from holds or how to just take off and run if

George Dillman (right) advocates martial arts lessons for all children because the first things taught are usually escape techniques.



PHOTO BY SARA FOGARTY

resident says. "Find someone who would know what to tell children and help them [develop] courage and be mentally prepared."

The more confident the parents are about what they say will work, the less traumatic those lessons will be for the children, the *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member adds.

Peyton Quinn

Sometimes it's necessary to entrust a child's care to another person. For example, if there is an emergency and the parents cannot pick him up after school, they may need to ask a neighbor to bring the child home. To deal with that type of situation, reality-fight-



Kids must be taught to refuse to help adult strangers and to not worry about sounding rude when they announce their intentions, says Lito Angeles.

ing expert Peyton Quinn advises parents to create a password that only they and their children know.

"If someone shows up and says, 'Your mom asked me to pick you up,' they either know that code word or it's an attempted abduction," says the Lake George, Colorado-based teacher and author.

Lito Angeles

A popular ruse that a criminal will use to engage children is to ask them

questions or request help finding a lost pet, says Lito Angeles, a police officer in Southern California. That's why kids must be taught to be wary of strangers and refuse to help people they don't know. "Tell them that if anyone asks them for directions or help, they shouldn't worry about hurting the person's feelings because it's inappropriate for an adult to ask a child anything," he says. "There is nothing wrong with saying no or being assertive."

Paul Vunak

The neighborhood in which the family lives can impact the level of threat the kids face every day, says *jeet kune do* expert Paul Vunak, who resides in Capistrano Beach, California. "If I were a parent, the most important thing would be to simply keep the kids in a safe environment," he says. "Otherwise, there's not much they can do if an adult is set on doing what he plans to do."

Jeff Clancy

From an early age, children should be taught how to recognize threats in their environment, says Jeff Clancy, a Southern California law-enforcement officer. "Parents need to sit down with their kids and spend time educating them: 'These are red flags. When you see X, Y and Z, you should respond with A, B and C,'" he says.

The parents should tailor their conversations to the kids' level of understanding, using dolls or building blocks to illustrate different scenarios involving them and the bad person, he says.



The challenge for parents is to educate their kids about kidnappers and pedophiles without making them paranoid, says Bob Koga (right).

Gary Alexander

The most important thing kids should do if they are grabbed is find a way to break free from their captor, says *Black Belt Hall of Fame* member Gary Alexander, a resident of Edison, New Jersey. While 5-year-olds are no match for a 180-pound adult, there are some things they can do to loosen his grip so

Practical Precautions

According to Gaithersburg, Maryland-based self-defense expert Sammy Franco, the following tips can help you protect your children from danger:

- Avoid writing your child's name on clothes, lunch boxes or backpacks because it might enable a stranger to identify him.
- Tell your child that no one has the right to touch his body.
- Teach your child not to speak to strangers or accept gifts from them. If someone approaches your child on the street, he should stand at least five feet away from the stranger at all times, thus creating a gap that will allow the youngster to get away if he feels threatened.
- Accompany your child to public restrooms. If you cannot go in together, stand at the door and monitor how long the kid is inside.
- Have your child fingerprinted.
- Encourage your child to confide in you. Keeping secrets can result in increasingly dangerous situations.
- Support your child if he refuses to hug and kiss relatives, for that attitude will make it easier for him to say "No!" to a touchy-feely stranger.
- Enroll your child in a reality-based self-defense program to increase his awareness and learn practical martial arts techniques.

—S.F.

they can escape, the *isshin-ryu* karate expert says.

"If they are going for his nose, they can use a palm-heel strike because it uses the strongest part of the hand," he says. "It is one of the most natural movements, and it doesn't require a lot of training." Alternatively, youngsters can stick a finger in the assailant's eyes, punch him in the nose or kick him in the groin to create an opportunity to escape, he suggests.

Richard Fike

Small children may be able to delay an assault by making a lot of noise, says military hand-to-hand combat specialist Richard Fike, who lives in Madison, Ohio. "By at least resisting and scream-

ing 24 hours a day. "They have to live a normal life," he says.

Marc MacYoung

Small children generally cannot outrun an adult who is determined to catch them, but if they are approached on the street, they can use their size and agility to avoid the assailant by diving under a parked car, says Denver, Colorado-based self-defense instructor Marc MacYoung. "Kids can get under an SUV far better than an adult, and if they grab something on the bottom of the vehicle, it is very difficult to get them out," he says.

Darren Levine

Kids need to know how to attract the attention of adults who can help

Young children are particularly vulnerable when they are not with their parents, he warns. "If adults were held truly accountable, there would be fewer abductions," he says. "We've got to get back to that family atmosphere."

Scott Sonnon

Kids must learn to trust their instincts, says Scott Sonnon, a Seattle-based teacher of the Russian arts of self-defense. "Fear is their personal alarm system. They need to realize that it is something they were given as a gift. It's a technology of intuition. Children have that alarm system, and they should be encouraged to trust it."

However, many children are reluctant to follow their feelings and back

Who Is After Your Children?

Wing chun kung fu expert and *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member William Cheung, a resident of Melbourne, Australia, created the Stranger Danger program to teach people about 10 common ploys abductors use to lure children:

- **Giving gifts:** The stranger offers the child candy or a toy.
- **Being friendly:** The stranger tries to get close by being nice.
- **Playing games:** The stranger invents a game to get the child's attention.
- **Acting helpless:** The stranger pretends to need assistance.
- **Being the leader:** The stranger says, "Follow me so we can play a game."
- **Posing as a magician:** The stranger does magic tricks to attract the kid.
- **Playing the messenger:** The stranger tells the child his mother or father sent him to deliver a message.
- **Making promises:** The stranger promises to take the child someplace fun—such as an amusement park.
- **Being "Mr. Cool":** The stranger tries to impress the child.
- **Acting scary:** The stranger threatens the child.

—S.F.

ing and punching, they will draw so much attention that other people will see them," he explains. Even if they are unable to prevent being taken, there will be plenty of witnesses who can recall what happened and report details about the incident to authorities, he says.

Bob Koga

One of the most important things parents can do to protect their kids is educate them about the risks of pedophiles without making them paranoid, says Bob Koga, a Los Angeles-based retired police officer and *aikido* expert. "All you can do is educate them the best you can, giving them a constant reminder without causing them to be so afraid."

Parents still need to be vigilant about where their kids go, whom they play with and the background of any adult who supervises them, he says, but it is unrealistic to think they can watch their

them if they are being assaulted or abducted, says *Krav Maga* instructor Darren Levine, who is also the deputy district attorney for the County of Los Angeles' Crimes Against Peace Officers Section. Most of the time, when adults hear children screaming in a store, they turn away because they believe it is a case of a parent disciplining an unruly child, he explains. Predators like to capitalize on that by pretending to be the victim's father. Therefore, he says parents should teach their kids to shout: "I don't know this person! Help me! That's not my daddy!"

Larry Tatum

No matter what, parents need to be responsible for the well-being of their children, says American *kenpo* karate expert Larry Tatum, who teaches in Pasadena, California. "Giving them too much independence is dangerous these days."

away from a perceived threat because they are concerned someone will get mad at them, Sonnon adds. "Kids should be taught that even if they are wrong, no one will be angry with them if they feel fear and do something about it."

Rorion Gracie

Brazilian-*jujutsu* expert Rorion Gracie says the onus is on the parents to keep track of their children. They should not even allow their kids to play outside without adult supervision, he adds.

"The younger the kids, the more the parents have to keep a hawk eye on them to protect them from the crazy people out there," says the resident of Torrance, California. "The bottom line is, the kid expects you to do it." ❧

About the author: Sara Fogan is the managing editor of Black Belt.