

CHAPTER 14

HABITS OF SELF PROTECTION: COMMON SENSE IN ACTION

The world is not always nice, and not all people can be trusted.

These are hard facts which children must learn to deal with. This chapter explores simple, common-sense self protection. It contains suggestions for helping children and young people develop habits of safety which might enable them to avoid potentially dangerous situations; and ideas for verbal rehearsal of actions they might take if they do get into trouble.

It's good when your family can calmly discuss safety measures in the absence of any threat. But when there's been some incident which makes family members fearful, either reported in the media or in your neighbourhood, it's also prudent to help children think through what they themselves can do to increase their own safety. It helps reduce any feelings that the whole world is a bad place, and that people are helpless victims.

Points to remember

- Don't sensationalise. The attitude you want is, 'OK, the world isn't perfect, but here's what this is about. And, here's what you can do'.
- Be direct and specific. Don't hint at danger; say exactly what you mean. Don't be vague about what actions to take; make specific suggestions.
- Never close down a topic for discussion because it frightens you. That

will really frighten the child. If you can't talk about it, it really is too bad to handle.

- Rehearsals, in the form of thinking exercises, are helpful. Set up verbal scenarios and discuss with the child what actions to take; get them thinking about what they would do 'in case of'.
- When you have been talking about upsetting or unpleasant things, end with something positive. Even a statement like, 'Isn't it a good thing that most people are nice and kind', can be helpful. Try not to end on a note of black despair.
- Make sure young children know their full name, street address and phone number. Also teach them Dad and Mum's first names, and last names, if different from the child's.
- You have years to help children develop safety habits. Don't try to do it all in one go. Make general family safety just one more part of everyday living.

Please note. We are not talking about raising 'killer kids', who are more powerful than a local flasher, or able to leap tall child molesters at a single bound! **We are aiming for habits which lead to less likelihood of the child's getting into difficult situations in the first place, and knowledge of simple self protection actions,** appropriate to the age and activities of the child.

To start with, consider the following basic safety habits:

- Stay out of trouble in the first place.
- Resist unwanted behaviour; speak out, take action.
- Know how and where to get help if you need it.
- Tell someone if you have been molested or assaulted, and who to tell.
- Practice a few basic self defence actions, such as yelling loudly and running away.

This chapter will also discuss alcohol and other drug safety; sexual safety; and protection or reaction to incest and sexual assault by carers.

1. Basic safety habit: stay out of trouble

This is the best self protection. But we have to be specific. Vague warnings of danger don't give enough information to help kids learn to think for themselves. Compare the two statements below:

- You can't go. It's dangerous.
- You can't go to Tommy's because I don't want you walking alone after dark along the highway.

The specifics of *alone*, *after dark*, and *highway* help the child understand the