

# Keep Your Children Safe: Empower Them

By "Karate Mom",  
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Each year, there are more than 114,000 attempted abductions of children by non-family members. The U.S.

Department of Justice further provides:

- 797,500 children (younger than 18) were reported missing in a one-year period of time studied resulting in an average of 2,185 children being reported missing each day.
- 203,900 children were the victims of family abductions.
- 58,200 children were the victims of non-family abductions.
- 115 children were the victims of "stereotypical" kidnapping – crimes which involve someone the child does not know or someone of slight acquaintance, who holds the child overnight, transports the child 50 miles or more, kills the child, demands ransom, or intends to keep the child permanently.

These are statistics no family wants to experience first hand. The best defense as they say is a good offense, and also the best way to promote your child's safety. An informed child is an empowered child; an empowered child is a safe child.

Having taught martial arts to children as young as 3 years of age for more than fifteen years now, I have found that martial arts training can offer many benefits. Martial arts training can be a wonderful outlet for an energetic child as well as very beneficial spiritually, physically and mentally: spiritually, because it helps to instill good moral values such as respect for others as well as self respect, and integrity, physically, in the sense that the training, conditioning and flexibility exercises help to promote a healthy body and lifestyle, and mentally, by instilling confidence, focus, perseverance and discipline. Children involved in martial arts training often start performing better academically as well as socially. However, many traditional martial arts schools do not always address and teach realistic self defense techniques that children could actually use against a bigger and stronger adult that is attempting to abduct them.

When I became a mother keeping my children safe became the number one priority for me and like with all Moms, the thought of my children being abducted or molested was simply unbearable. Drawing upon my own martial arts training and specialty in women's self defense training, I started to determine what types of techniques would actually work for a child attempting to defend themselves against a larger and much stronger adult. My husband (who is also an accomplished martial artist) and I started doing some role playing scenarios with our own children to test various methods out. We would pick up our children and tell them to scream as loud as they could and to just go wild, flailing and scratching like a cat that does not want to take a bath and to do everything possible to get themselves to the ground and escape. And we taught them they must absolutely refuse to be taken to another location, even if threatened with a weapon.

One of the easiest techniques that I teach to children (and women as well) when grabbed by the wrist(s), or the collar, is to immediately drop to the ground, lie on your back and start kicking and screaming. Scream as loud as you can in order to get others involved in your situation. When you drop to the ground and start kicking, you make it very difficult for the potential abductor to pick you up or drag you away. We tell the kids to kick as if they are peddling like mad on their bicycle, rapidly bringing their knees to their chest and driving, stomping hard with their heels, into the attackers face, knees, groin, etc.



The Karate Mom teaching a student how to drop down and break away from a stranger. De La Rosa wears protective garb so her students can get a realistic feel in practicing their self defense skills full force.

As parents we all want to raise well behaved and obedient children; however it is most often the obedient or very shy child that is most at risk of being abducted. Therefore we must do our utmost to teach our children that it is o.k. to fight back – o.k. to say, "no" to an adult. Children respond really well to role playing scenarios, in which they can actually, practice saying "NO" to an adult. It is also good for children to practice their self defense techniques on a larger and stronger adult because allowing them to do so full force on an adult goes a long way in building confidence. When done in an age appropriate manner, teaching children exactly what to do in a stressful situation dispels fear and actually makes them feel safer.

Many parents have shared with me that acting out different situations with their children, actually spurred further discussion between themselves and their children. For instance, they would be at the park or grocery store and start to discuss what to do if the child became separated from the parent, or if someone tried to lure the child with a story of needing help. They would discuss who the child could go to for help, like a store clerk, or another mom with children.

I truly believe that children should practice self defense and escape skills as often as possible. Just as schools routinely hold fire drills to diffuse panic and provide emergency instructions, I would love to see every school district across the country begin to implement some type of self defense or anti-abduction program for their students.

#### Empowerment Checklist

✓ Teach your child the difference between "good" strangers and "bad" strangers. Good strangers are: uniformed police officers, a uniformed clerk inside of a retail store, restaurant employees or another mom with children and should be sought out and gone to for help.

✓ Predators will try to befriend a child and will use any number of scenarios in an attempt to lure children to go with them. More children are lured into vehicles as opposed to being forced into a vehicle. Remind your children that adults they don't know should never ask them for help, directions, etc. If they do, they are 'bad strangers'.

✓ Children should never go anywhere with a stranger, even if that bad

stranger threatens to hurt them or a family member, and always, ALWAYS refuse to be taken to another location. Tell them to run away and scream as loud as they can if someone follows them or tries to force them into a car. Teach them to move away from any car that pulls up beside them driven by a stranger and to run in the opposite direction that the vehicle is traveling.

✓ Let them know that when it comes to staying safe and defending themselves it is O.K. to break all the rules. If they are grabbed in a store it's O.K. to start breaking merchandise and grab onto shelves, displays or even another person – anything to attract attention and resist being taken. If they feel they are being forced or dragged to another location, it's O.K. to drop to the ground and start kicking wildly, and screaming: stranger, help, fire or 911. That it's O.K. to use all the self defense techniques and getaway moves that they know: hit, kick, scream, bite, break free and run as fast as they can and to keep screaming as loud they can. There are no rules in self defense. It is also important to stress the fact that if a stranger grabs them it's O.K. to give up backpacks, iPods, jewelry, cash, bikes, scooters etc. NOTHING is more important than their safety.

Michelle De La Rosa holds a 3rd degree black belt in Okinawan Shorei Goju Ryu Karate, is a Level 2 Muay Thai Practitioner and a student of Jiu Jitsu, Haganah and Krav Maga. De La Rosa is also certified in women's self defense and as a Rape Escape instructor. She created and developed the Karate Mom C.A.R.E.S. Program (Children's Abduction Avoidance and Rapid Escape System) out of her commitment and dedication to ensuring safety for children. Together with her husband Ben, a 1st degree black belt, Level 3 Muay Thai instructor and Mixed Martial Arts trainer, the De La Rosas offer numerous classes and seminars for children and adults in addition to the C.A.R.E.S. programs including "Fight Like a Girl" self defense parties and "Grappling & Ground Fighting", in addition to private and semi-private lessons. Michelle can be contacted by phone at: 847-297-2788, or email at: 1KarateMom@comcast.net. For more information, log onto to her company website at: MBDmartialarts.com.

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