

TEACHING SELF-PROTECTION TO CHILDREN USING TELEVISION TECHNIQUES

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This study compared the effectiveness of a videotape training program with other methods of teaching children self-protection to prevent child abduction. Subjects were kindergarten and first-grade students. Four experimental conditions were presented: videotape with behavior rehearsal, videotape only, a standard safety program, and no training. Acquisition of self-protective behaviors was measured at posttraining and follow-up by having confederate adults entice the children near their schools and homes. Results revealed that the videotape program with behavior rehearsal was highly effective in teaching children safe responses to potential abductors. The standard safety program was effective with fewer than half of the children. Three fourths of the children who received no training immediately agreed to go with the confederate suspects. The videotape program can be easily used with groups of young children in a classroom setting.

DESCRIPTORS: self-protection, child abduction, child molestation, safety, instructional television, direct instruction, videotape training, young children

Although the problem of child abduction is not new, it has generated more attention in recent years. Because of the nature of the crime, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at an accurate estimate of its incidence. Several authors, however, conclude that it is indeed a major problem in the U.S. and other countries (Finkelhor, 1979; Geiser, 1979; Helfer & Kempe, 1976; Walters, 1975). Although most missing children are kidnapped by an estranged parent, many are abducted by nonrelatives and are sexually victimized by their captors, and some are murdered ("Captive Girl Freed," 1981; "Hostage Girl Freed," 1981; "Mounties Say," 1981; "Parents Learn," 1981).

Tobias and Gordon (1977) conducted a survey of children in a Michigan county where seven children had been abducted and murdered in the course of a year. They found that, in 1 year, 782 children

in this county reported being approached by adults who attempted to persuade them to get in a car or go somewhere with them. Interviews with, and behavioral assessment of, child molesters disclosed the startling fact that abduction and molestation occurred whenever the opportunity presented itself (Forgione, 1976). Thus, any unsupervised child may be a susceptible target.

Studies of child abductors have revealed that only 10% to 17% use physical force to obtain their victims (Groth & Bernbaum, 1978; Tobias & Gordon, 1977). Most attempt to develop a relationship with the child or verbally entice the child. Young children may be highly susceptible to the lures of potential abductors. In one study investigators found that 90% of children ages 3 to 6 who were approached by a personable adult posing as an abductor agreed to go with the abductor (Poche, Brouwer, & Swearingen, 1981). These studies suggest the possibility of preventing abductions by teaching children to resist inducements and to react quickly.

There are several reports of programs to teach safety skills to children, such as emergency phone use (Jones & Kazdin, 1980), fire safety (Jones, Kazdin, & Haney, 1981), and other home safety skills (Peterson, 1984). There are also educational programs to teach children knowledge of sexual abuse and prevention (Conte, 1984; Hazzard &

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Angert, 1986). However, there are very few experimentally validated programs available to teach young children appropriate responses to the enticements of potential abductors. One experimental program, using instructions and modeling, was designed to teach retarded adults or emotionally disturbed adolescents to prevent abduction (Agras, Ballard, Gipson, & Telch, 1981; Ballard, Gipson, Lawson, & Telch, 1979). Pre- and posttesting involved asking subjects to say what they would do in abduction situations represented with slides. Some of the problems with this approach include using the word "stranger" to designate a potential abductor when, in fact, the large majority of child abductors are known at least casually by their victims (Finkelhor, 1979; Geiser, 1979; Roberts, 1979; Walters, 1975). Second, programs that emphasize the dangers of strangers may produce indiscriminate fear of all unfamiliar persons. Finally, there is no assurance that what trainees say they will do in a classroom situation corresponds with what they will actually do in an encounter with an abductor.

In another study (Poche *et al.*, 1981) preschool children's responses to three common lures were assessed in realistic situations near the children's school. An effective program was developed to teach children self-protection responses in these situations. In a more recent study, Miltenberger and Thiesse-Duffy (1988) taught 4- to 7-year-old children to resist the enticements of potential abductors using behavioral skills training provided by professional trainers in the home. Training was effective in role-play assessments and in a posttraining abduction simulation. However, the procedures in these studies required two adult trainers and individual training in an outdoor setting or in the child's home. These requirements may preclude widespread adoption of the procedures for classroom use.

Several films are available for use in classrooms to address the problem of child abduction (Arnold, 1978; B. F. A., 1977; Davis, 1972, 1975, 1977). Unfortunately, many portray abductors as villainous strangers, and none of them have been tested to determine if they change the behavior of children.

The purpose of the present study was to extend the work of Poche *et al.* (1981) by developing and evaluating a videotape training program designed to teach self-protective skills to young children. It was designed to avoid the problems noted with other films.

METHOD

Subjects and Setting

The subjects were 74 children, 29 in kindergarten, and 45 in first grade. They ranged in age from 5 to 7 years. There were 33 girls and 41 boys in the study; 19 were black and 55 were white. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents of all children who participated in the study. The children were selected from three public schools located in low, middle, and upper middle income neighborhoods in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Training was conducted in the children's classrooms. Posttraining measurement took place outdoors on a sidewalk near each school building. Follow-up assessment took place along a street or sidewalk near each child's home.

Videotape Program

The instructional program was a professionally produced, 20-min color videotape. It portrayed several scenes in which a variety of male adults approached children in a friendly manner and enticed them. The physical characteristics of the adults portraying abductors in the videotape were similar to those of convicted kidnappers and molesters (*i.e.*, they were black and white males, ages 20 to 30, dressed in casual attire; Tobias & Gordon, 1977). Some of the adults called the children by name, suggesting that there was a familiar relationship. The enticements used by the adults were typical of those used by actual abductors (Tobias & Gordon, 1977), such as offering to take the child to meet his parents or promising the child a surprise.

When enticed, each child actor demonstrated two safety rules. The first rule was to say, "No, I have to go ask my teacher (mother or father)." Second, the child ran quickly to the child's teacher (mother or father).

The verbal response was brief so that the children could get away quickly. It permitted children to respond politely to people who intended no harm. It implied that the children had good relationships with parents or teachers, because many molesters prey upon children who have poor relationships with their families (Roberts, 1979). Finally, the response did not use the term "stranger" because most molesters are not complete strangers to their victims (Walters, 1975). The running response removed the child from the potentially dangerous situation before the abductor could try another enticement or seize the child.

Several instructional features were incorporated into the videotape program to enhance its effectiveness. First, to a degree, the videotape was interactive. That is, after each scene, the narrator on the videotape asked the viewers if the children in the film said and did the right things. Pauses were provided for viewers' replies. The narrator then praised appropriate responses and corrected inappropriate ones in this manner: "If you said ___, you're right, good listening! If you said ___, then I've fooled you. Watch again. . . ."

Another feature, the model-lead-test format (Becker & Engelmann, 1977; Bryan & Schwartz, 1971), was used to minimize errors and maximize initial correct responding. That is, the child actors demonstrated correct responses while the narrator provided leading statements regarding the correct responses. Subsequently, test lures were included, in which the adult actors directly faced the camera and enticed the viewers. Pauses were provided for responses by the viewers, and the narrator again defined and praised correct responses.

Another technique involved teaching the minimum difference (Becker & Engelmann, 1977). For example, one child was shown running from the abductor but in a direction away from rather than toward the school building. The narrator pointed out the minimum differences between correct and incorrect responses, and the child actors corrected their responses in later scenes.

Finally, other important features of the videotape included "informed instruction" in which the narrator guided the viewers' attention (Yussen, 1974),

narrator praise for the child actors' correct responses (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963), and the use of the subjective viewpoint, showing what a child sees when approached by an abductor (Molstad, 1974).

Experimental Conditions

Videotape only. In this condition, children viewed the videotape program in their classrooms. A trainer prompted their interactive responses to appropriate segments of the videotape. The trainer was a police officer whose responsibilities included visiting schools to tell children about personal safety. The officer was in his 30s and wore street clothes rather than a uniform. This condition lasted approximately 25 min.

Videotape plus behavior rehearsal. In this condition, children viewed the videotape with the trainer as in the Videotape Only condition. Then, a behavior rehearsal was conducted in the classroom with each subject. The trainer assumed the role of a friendly abductor and presented an enticement. If the child demonstrated the criterion verbal and motor responses, he praised the child. If not, he verbalized the correct responses and presented another enticement. He repeated this procedure until the child displayed the criterion responses. This condition lasted approximately 45 min.

Standard program. This program, routinely made available in the schools prior to this study, was presented by the same trainer. He described the two safety rules presented in the videotape program. He discussed several typical abduction situations and asked the children what they would do in each. He praised appropriate answers and corrected inappropriate ones. The trainer also showed a brief film on personal safety that warned children not to go with strangers. This condition lasted approximately 60 min.

No-training control. Children in this condition received no formal training in self-protection until the end of the study.

Self-Protective Behaviors

The criterion self-protective behaviors consisted of both verbal and motor responses. If near the school, the criterion verbal response was "No, I

have to go ask my teacher." If near the home, the criterion response was "No, I have to go ask my mother (father)." The criterion motor response was to run a distance of at least 20 ft toward the school or home, whichever was nearest, within 5 s after the enticement was given.

For the purposes of data analysis, the subjects' responses were assigned numerical values as follows: 0, went with abductor regardless of verbal response; 1, stayed near with no refusal; 2, stayed near but used any refusal; 3, ran away with no refusal; and 4, ran away with any refusal.

Posttraining Observation Procedures

Posttraining probes were conducted 1 or 2 days after training. The experimenters arranged a simulation in which an adult male posed as a potential abductor, approached each child in a friendly manner, and attempted to entice the child to go with him. The child's responses to the enticements were directly observed and recorded on a data sheet.

One of the experimenters, a male doctoral psychology student, was introduced as a physical education teacher. He took each child outdoors one at a time on a pretense of participating in a sport. He then pretended to forget something and went inside, leaving the child alone approximately 20 to 60 yards from the building.

A male adult portraying an abductor then approached the child and chatted in a friendly manner (e.g., saying, "Nice day, isn't it?" or "What are you doing?"). The adult then used a combination of the incentive and authority lures (e.g., "I have a surprise for you in my car. Would you like to come with me to see it? I just talked to your teacher and he or she told me it was all right for you to go with me.") If the child agreed to go with him, the abductor began to walk away with the child. If the child ran away from him, the abductor walked away from the home or school building. If the child stayed near him and either verbally refused to go or said nothing, the abductor repeated the enticement up to three times. If the child continued to refuse or to say nothing, the abductor walked away.

The experimenter observed the episode from the school building and returned to the child as soon

as the abductor started to walk away or the child started to go with the abductor. If the child started to go with the abductor, the experimenter called out the child's name and told the child to wait for him. The abductor then moved quickly out of sight.

The experimenter joined the child and asked the child to relate what had happened. If the child had verbally refused to go with the abductor and ran away from him, the experimenter praised the child's correct responses. If the child had not responded correctly, the experimenter explained the correct responses and rehearsed the situation with the child. This brief training was conducted for ethical reasons, so that children who had not learned self-protection during the indoor group training could receive one session of outdoor individual training similar to that found effective in an earlier study (Poche *et al.*, 1981). After the assessment the child was returned to the classroom. Because the teacher was in the middle of a class activity, the subjects did not have an opportunity to talk with one another until all were tested and the debriefing was held.

Debriefing

After posttraining, the experimenter debriefed the entire class. The children in the three treatment conditions were reminded of the classroom presentations seen earlier and told that the purpose of the outdoor exercises was not only to test their sports ability but also to see how they would respond to an enticement. Children in the control groups were shown the training videotape after the conclusion of the study but were not behaviorally tested after the videotape. In addition, the experimenter described several potentially dangerous situations, asked the children what they should do, and prompted them to say aloud the correct verbal response and to state the correct motor response.

Follow-up Observation Procedures

To test the durability and generality of the children's self-protective behaviors, follow-up observations were conducted 1 month after training. Only children who both ran away from the abductor and used a verbal refusal (criterion or other) during the posttraining probe were assessed. Of the

23 children who met these criteria, 9 were available for follow-up measurement. The remaining 14 children were unable to participate because of summer vacations, disconnected phones, illnesses, and accidents. Four of the 9 children who met the criteria and were available for follow-up observation were in the Videotape Plus Behavior Rehearsal condition, four were in the Videotape Only condition, and one was in the Standard Presentation condition.

Parents gave the experimenters a day and time when their child would be playing outdoors near their home. The follow-up probe was conducted in a manner identical to the posttraining probe except that a different adult presented the enticement. The child's behavior was directly observed and recorded, and, following the probe, the parent praised correct behavior or used rehearsal in response to incorrect behavior. The parent also debriefed the child following the probe.

Interobserver Agreement

The adult portraying an abductor served as the primary observer and recorded each child's verbal and motor responses as soon as the simulation was over. This observer was blind to the experimental condition of each subject. The experimenter who portrayed the physical education teacher remained inside the school door and served as a reliability observer for the child's motor responses. An agreement was scored if both the primary and the reliability observers recorded the same motor response. Agreement was 100% at all observation sessions at the schools.

Experimental Design

A posttest-only control group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) was used. Children were assigned to one of four experimental conditions in the following manner. School A had four kindergarten and four first-grade classes. Each kindergarten and each first-grade class were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Schools B and C each had two kindergarten and four first-grade classes. Each first-grade class was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The four kindergartens at these two schools were also each randomly assigned to

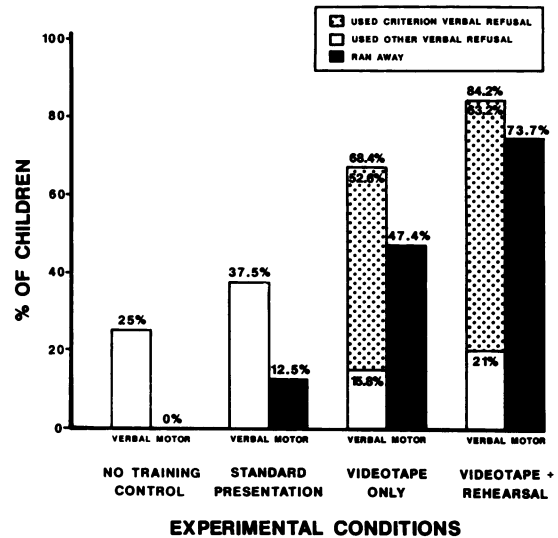


Figure 1. The percentage of children in each experimental condition who displayed each of the appropriate verbal and motor responses at the posttraining probe.

one of the four conditions. Thus, there were two kindergarten and three first-grade classes, or five total classes, randomly assigned to each of the four experimental conditions.

All of the children in each class, regardless of whether or not they were subjects in the study, received the experimental condition assigned to their class, in accordance with requests from school officials. The only exception was the indoor behavior rehearsal, which was provided solely for the subjects in the Videotape Plus Rehearsal condition. From each of the 20 classes in the study, 3 or 4 children were randomly selected (from those who returned informed consent forms) to receive the behavior rehearsal and measurement procedures. A total of 19 children were available for the Videotape Only and Videotape Plus Rehearsal conditions, 20 for the No Training control, and 16 for the Standard Presentation.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the percentage of children in each condition who displayed the appropriate verbal and motor responses. The Videotape Plus Rehearsal condition was most effective in teaching

VERBAL RESPONSES

	AGREED TO GO	SAID NOTHING	USED OTHER CRITERION REFUSAL	USED CRITERION REFUSAL
WENT WITH	2			
STAYED NEAR			2	1
RAN AWAY		1	2	11

VIDEOTAPE+REHEARSAL

	AGREED TO GO	SAID NOTHING	USED OTHER CRITERION REFUSAL	USED CRITERION REFUSAL
WENT WITH	4			
STAYED NEAR	2		3	1
RAN AWAY				9

VIDEOTAPE ONLY

MOTOR RESPONSES

WENT WITH	7		5	
STAYED NEAR	2			
RAN AWAY		1	1	

STANDARD PRESENTATION

WENT WITH	15			
STAYED NEAR			5	
RAN AWAY				

NO TRAINING CONTROL

Figure 2. The number of subjects in each experimental condition who displayed each verbal and motor response at the posttraining probe.

children to refuse the enticement and run back to school, followed by the Videotape Only condition. Most of the children in both conditions used the criterion verbal refusal. Few children in the Standard Presentation condition and none of the children in the No Training control condition ran away. In addition, none of them used the criterion refusal.

Figure 2 shows the total number of children in each condition who displayed each verbal and motor response at the posttraining probe. This figure clearly shows that the best results were found in the Videotape Plus Rehearsal condition, followed by the Videotape Only condition. The data indicate that some children in each condition agreed to go

with the abductor and actually went with him. Only 10.5% of the children in the Videotape Plus Rehearsal condition displayed these unsafe responses, followed by 21% in the Videotape Only condition, 43.8% in the Standard Presentation condition, and 75% in the No Training control condition. The percentage of children displaying both the criterion verbal and motor responses was highest in the Videotape Plus Rehearsal condition (58%), followed by the Videotape Only condition (47%). None of the children in the Standard Presentation or No Training control conditions displayed both the criterion verbal and motor responses. At follow-up, all of the children performed the same behaviors

they exhibited during the posttraining probe, with the exception of one child in the Videotape Only condition who ran away but used a refusal other than the criterion refusal.

Children who used the criterion verbal response tended to be more likely to use the criterion motor response. Of the children who used the criterion verbal response, 91% also ran away from the abductor, but only 16.7% of those who used some other verbal refusal subsequently ran away.

An analysis of variance was conducted on the values assigned to the subjects' responses. The analysis indicated a significant difference among groups, $F(3, 69) = 19.48, p < .0001$. Planned comparisons showed that the scores for the Videotape Plus Rehearsal group were significantly higher than the scores for the Videotape Only group, $F(1, 69) = 4.11, p < .05$, which in turn were significantly higher than those for the Standard Presentation group, $F(1, 69) = 16.70, p < .01$. There were no significant differences between the Standard Presentation and the No Training control groups, $F(1, 69) = 0.22, p > .1$.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm the alarming findings of an earlier study (Poche et al., 1981), in which young children were found to be highly susceptible to the enticements of potential abductors. Three fourths of the children ages 5 to 7 who received no formal instruction in self-protection went immediately with the adult portraying the abductor, and the remainder stayed near the abductor. These figures stress the need for formal training in self-protection for children below the age of 8.

The study also showed that most children ages 5 to 7 who receive a standard personal safety presentation from a police officer are not prepared to respond safely to an abductor. Almost 90% of the children who heard the presentation either went with the abductor or stayed dangerously near him. It is apparent that teachers and parents cannot rely on the typical safety presentation to protect their children.

The study demonstrated that the 20-min vid-

eotape training program was effective by itself in teaching self-protection to approximately half of the children who viewed it only once. Thus, the program by itself appears to be more powerful than a 60-min live presentation commonly used in schools. In combination with a single indoor behavior rehearsal, the videotape program was effective in teaching self-protection to approximately three fourths of the children.

The durability and generality of training were demonstrated among the children who participated in follow-up probes. These children maintained the responses for at least 1 month after training in a different setting and with a different "abductor."

The results also suggest a correspondence between the criterion verbal and motor responses. That is, nearly all of the children who used this response ran away, whereas only a small percentage of children who simply said "No" or "Uh, uh" ran away. These results suggest that it would be better to teach children a descriptive criterion verbal response that occasions a specific escape response.

The experiment also demonstrated that children can be taught self-protective skills without being given a rationale, such as the possibility of harm. This finding alleviates the problem of producing a generalized fear of meeting new people and simplifies the training process. Moreover, the videotape format has all the advantages of convenience, standardization, and efficiency that may be difficult to achieve with in situ formats (Poche et al., 1981).

An anecdotal incident illustrated the accomplishment of our goal of teaching a safe response to a specific, potentially dangerous situation rather than a generalized fear of strangers. One child approached for follow-up observation was found sitting on the sidewalk in front of her house, crying. The adult portraying an abductor started a conversation with her, and she stopped crying, perked up, and began to talk freely with the adult. However, as soon as the enticement was presented, she jumped up, yelled, "No way!" and ran toward her home, calling back as she ran, "I have to go ask my mother!"

The experimenters were sensitive to the possibility that the use of confederate abductors might

frighten the children. In an earlier study (Poche et al., 1981), however, nearly all of the children immediately agreed to go with the confederate abductor, suggesting that they were not frightened. In the No Training control condition in this study, three fourths of the children immediately agreed to go with the confederate abductor and the rest stayed near him, again suggesting a lack of fear. The experimenters considered the importance of measuring what children would *actually* say and do, not just what they *said* they would do. In addition, the realistic probe was a learning situation in itself and enabled the children to experience what it feels like to be approached and enticed. Further, children received the probe only if their parents had given written informed consent. Finally, although there were no formal measures of parent satisfaction, all the parents who were contacted for follow-up probes expressed positive sentiment about the study.

This study underlined the need for training in self-protection and demonstrated the effectiveness of an easy-to-use training package that could be presented at home, in schools and community centers, and on broadcast television. Future research should evaluate the effectiveness of the program with 3- and 4-year-olds as well as with children older than 7. Because mentally retarded children are also likely to become victims of an abductor, the usefulness of the program with these children should be evaluated. Although follow-up observations were limited to 1 month after training due to the unavailability of researchers and subjects, it is important to know if and when children must be retrained in self-protection. Future research should assess the durability of responding for a longer period of time after training.

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