

Parents can help preteens with abduction concerns

May 23 2013, by Malisa Rader & Laura Sternweis

Parents naturally are concerned for their children's safety, particularly when there is news of a child abduction that happens close to home. Finding the balance between emotions and the "teachable moment" as parents talk to their children is important, an Iowa State University Extension and Outreach specialist says.

According to Malisa Rader, an ISU Extension family life program specialist, [preteens](#) and older school-age children might be dealing with their own fears based upon what they are seeing on TV or hearing from others.

"It is important at this time that parents react with a sense of calm and reassurance," Rader said.

Parents can take this opportunity to share with their children important information to help avoid potentially [dangerous situations](#), but need to approach it in a manner that doesn't create unhealthy fears in children.

Rader offered some suggestions from eXtension.org/parenting:

- Give hugs and reassurance as you talk to your child about the frightening experience.
- Avoid frightening media stories that might be upsetting to some children.
- Point out ways your child has learned to stay safe, such as saying "no" and running away when they are concerned about a

situation.

Help young people process thoughts, feelings

Rader encourages parents to watch their children closely for signs of anxiousness. Being open to talk about those [feelings](#) while developing safety strategies can help children feel in control of situations. They can learn to make good choices when faced with possible unsafe circumstances, while still enjoying some of the carefree aspects of childhood.

"Be open to how your child might be feeling and talk with him or her with sincerity and [honesty](#)," Rader said.

This is an opportunity to discuss any number of issues with teens and preteens—from not putting themselves in particularly dangerous situations to how to react when they sense they might be in potential danger, Rader said.

"This is a teachable moment, so use it! But doing so in a calm, reassuring manner will help your point come across more clearly without raising unhealthy fears in young people," the ISU Extension specialist said.

Watch for signals that further help might be needed

The following signs are normal reactions to severe stress, Rader said. However, if one or more of the signs continue for more than a week, seek outside help.

- Depression—Signs include sleep pattern changes such as difficulty falling asleep, frequently waking in the night or too early in the morning, continual sleeping; personal care changes

such as skipping baths and shampoos; physical or mental changes such as overeating or under eating, feeling numb or continually tired, losing the ability to concentrate or crying constantly.

- Parenting problems, such as the inability to cope and give needed attention to children
- Behavioral problems, such as children acting up frequently or getting into trouble with authorities
- Isolation—not having anyone to talk with
- Inability to face reality—not wanting to admit how serious the problems really are or to begin work on them

"Help is available," Rader said. "You don't have to face these problems alone. If you note any signs of anxiousness or depression in your child or your self, talk with a mental health professional, your family doctor or clergy. These people can provide extra support when you need it."

Provided by Iowa State University

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