

**TEACHING CHILDREN ABDUCTION PREVENTION SKILLS:
STRANGERS VS. PEOPLE WE DON'T KNOW**


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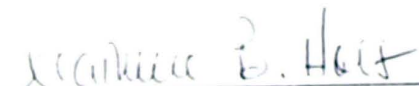
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A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
Austin Peay State University

Elizabeth Ann Hartman

May 1997

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Mr. Fred W. Hartman, Jr. and Mrs. Beth Hartman, for their love and encouragement, and for always believing in me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend a deep appreciation to my committee members for the time and effort that they put into my thesis. I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Nanci Stewart Woods, for her support, guidance and encouragement throughout my studies at APSU. I would also like to thank Dr. Charles Grah for his time, effort and assistance with statistics. I would like to thank Dr. Maureen McCarthy for her ideas and suggestions on my thesis and for her support and encouragement during my graduate studies. I wish to extend great appreciation to the seven APSU students who assisted me in collecting data—I could not have done it without you. A special thanks to the parents who allowed their children to participate in my study. Your participation and enthusiasm was appreciated. To the administration and staff at Clarksville Academy, you were extremely helpful and supportive throughout my project. I appreciated your cooperation and donation of class time to my project. To my fiancée, thank you for providing me with unconditional love and encouragement, and for giving me the emotional support I needed to complete this step in my education. I would especially like to thank my parents, Fred and Beth Hartman, for instilling in me the desire to learn and achieve. You gave me the courage to set my goals high and you never doubted for a second that I could reach them.

ABSTRACT

The current study was an attempt to examine whether a simple, inexpensive program intended for group administration could effectively teach children abduction prevention skills without creating fear or anxiety in the child. Two training lessons were tested for effectiveness. It was hypothesized that since most children have misconceptions regarding the term "stranger," a training lesson about "people you don't know" might be more effective than a training lesson about "strangers." Children were taught one of two nearly identical lessons, less the terminology used. A simulated abduction attempt (SAA) was used to test whether children learned and could apply the skills taught in the lesson. A no-training control group was used as a comparison. Results suggest that the training had a significant effect on children's reactions toward a stranger's lure. Children in the two training groups performed better on the SAA than did children in the control group. However, no significant differences in scores were found between the two training groups. Also, parental reports suggested that the training was effective in teaching self-protection skills in a manner that did not frighten the children or cause them to feel more anxious around people they do not know. Implications and directions for further research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The importance of protecting children from abduction has long been an issue of concern for parents and researchers. In the 1980's the urgency to teach "stranger danger" to children increased after a series of child kidnappings. Parents may suddenly become more fearful when several abductions occur in the same region during a short period of time (Hooks, 1996, July 27). Even when a child abduction attempt is unsuccessful, parents in that community may become concerned with how to protect their children. One estimate of attempted, rather than only successful abductions is more than 100,000 each year with most perpetrators using lures, not force, to abduct or attempt to abduct their victim (Finkelhor, Hotelling, & Asdigian, 1995).

Children may be abducted by family members or by strangers. Most abduction prevention programs focus on preventing abduction by strangers. Estimates of nonfamily abductions have been the subject of controversy, due to the confusion between the legal definition of abduction and the more publicized stereotypical abductions. The legal definition of abduction means the coercive movement of a person over a set distance or an unlawful confinement of a person for a set length of time (standards vary by state). The stereotypical abductions include the removal of a child from his/her environment for a long period of time for the purposes of ransom, assault, or murder (Finkelhor, Hotelling, & Sedlak, 1992). It was estimated that there were between 3200-4600

successful legal-definition abductions reported in 1988 nationwide, with 200-300 of those of the stereotypical type (Finkelhor et al., 1992).

While these estimates are enough to cause concern from officials and parents, they do not warrant the use of programs that may create generalized anxiety or instill in children a fear of all strangers. Because of the need to preserve normal, daily social interaction, along with the need for children to sometimes turn to strangers for help in emergency situations, it is important to teach children safe behaviors without making them unduly anxious about all people. In the words of Kraizer (1986), we must strive to "... prevent abuse and abduction without sacrificing the very children we mean to protect. . ." (p. 261).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Abduction Prevention Programs

Several programs have been developed to teach abduction prevention using different populations such as individuals with special needs (Watson, Bain, & Houghton, 1992; Gast, Collins, Wolery, & Jones, 1993; Haseltine & Miltenberger, 1990) preschool children (Poche, Brouwer, & Swearingen, 1981; Carroll-Rowan & Miltenberger, 1994; Holcombe, Wolery, & Katzenmeyer, 1995) and school-age children (Briggs, 1991; Flanagan, 1986; Poche, Yoder, & Miltenberger, 1988; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Miltenberger, Thiesse-Duffy, Suda, Kozak, & Bruellman, 1990; Fryer, Kraizer, & Miyoshi, 1987a).

Previous programs have tried using different trainers to teach abduction prevention to children. Parents have been evaluated (Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Miltenberger et al., 1990) as well as expert instructors (Flanagan, 1986; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Fryer et al., 1987a; Miltenberger et al., 1990). Each had different success rates, with the expert instruction having the overall best results.

In past research, different methodologies have been used to evaluate program success. Self-report methods have been evaluated and compared to behavioral measures (Flanagan, 1986; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Miltenberger et al., 1990). The conclusion from these studies has been that behavioral measures are necessary because unfortunately what children say

they will do if a stranger tries to abduct them does not correspond well with their actual behavior in a simulated abduction attempt (SAA). This lack of correlation between knowledge and behavior has led to the common use of SAAs to evaluate real learning. Most recent researchers have used SAA techniques in assessing their programs.

Simulated Abduction Attempts (SAAs). In general, during SAAs, a researcher takes children individually to engage in some sort of activity outdoors or within the school building. Eventually, the researcher asks the child to wait and leaves the child alone for a few moments while a research assistant, unknown to the child, approaches the child and tries to get the child to leave with him/her. If the child refuses, the assistant thanks the child and leaves. If the child agrees to go, the assistant tells the child he/she will return for the child later and leaves, or the researcher suddenly returns to the child to complete the activity they were engaged in previously. The children are not threatened in any way, and most children do not even realize that they are being tested.

Individual Training Programs. The following four studies have all used individualized training methods. In 1988, Flanagan conducted a study with six children between the ages of six and eight years old using this SAA approach. Overall on the baseline measurement, children's reports of how they would react to strangers were better than how they actually responded. Children averaged about 72% correct answers on a safety knowledge questionnaire, meaning that the children had a fairly good idea about what they should do when approached

by a stranger. Unfortunately, their behavioral responses to “strangers” who approached them in a public place were extremely poor, with the responses being only 4% correct. Children were required to respond with a specific sequence of behaviors (e.g., scream, run away, and tell adult), depending on how the stranger approached them (e.g., grabbed, chased, or spoke) during the SAA. After baseline measures were taken, the children were individually trained to react appropriately when approached by a stranger using a strictly behavioral method (repeated role-play and learning appropriate behavioral sequences when approached). A three-week follow-up revealed that the children’s correct behavioral responses to the stranger were maintained at acceptable levels (75%). Follow-up measures on the knowledge questionnaire revealed that the children also improved by correctly answering an average of 97% of the questions about how they should respond if approached by a stranger. Again, children’s reports of knowledge of appropriate responses were better than their actual responses to the pretend stranger.

The limited number of participants in this study limited generalizability of the results to large numbers of children. The training program used was complex, with children required to learn eight behavior clusters. It may be helpful to implement a simpler plan for younger children.

Miltenberger and Thiesse-Duffy (1988) conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of home-based methods of teaching children to protect themselves from sexual abuse and abduction. The participants included 24 children, ages 4-

7 years. The Red Flag, Green Flag Prevention Book, a picture workbook designed to be used in the home to teach about child sexual abuse and abduction prevention, was used by parents to train the children. Unfortunately, home-based parent-directed instruction had no significant effects on behavior. Children subsequently received intense one-to-one training by a trained researcher. A two-month follow-up was used to assess each child's retention of the behavioral skills following the intensive researcher training. Each child was exposed to a SAA in their yard or a store to assess how they would react to the lure of a stranger. Results showed that the children did learn how to respond correctly, and the two-month follow-up showed that these skills were maintained by the older children (6-7 years). In order to provide protective skills to larger groups of children, a simpler program that does not require individualized expert instruction might be more suitable.

Miltenberger et al. (1990) later investigated whether parents could be taught the same skills used by the experts in Miltenberger and Thiesse-Duffy's (1988) study. Nine children (four 4-5-year-olds and five 6-7-year-olds) and their parents participated. Results showed that even after going through the program twice, the children did not show proper reactions to potentially dangerous situations during the role-play. The 6-7-year-olds showed only slight improvement, while the 4-5-year-olds showed no improvement. Both age groups, however, did eventually learn correct responses to strangers during the

SAA when trained by the researcher. Unfortunately, most children are not able to receive intense one-on-one intervention from trained personnel.

In a particularly complex and intensive training study, Poche et al. (1981) used modeling, behavior rehearsal, and social reinforcement with three preschoolers. Children were taught two target behaviors, including a verbal response of "No, I have to ask my teacher," and a motor response of moving at least 20 feet from the stranger within three seconds of the presented lure. Children were trained to respond to three types of lures including simple requests to leave with the stranger, requests that implied an authority figure gave permission for the child to go, and an incentive request promising the child a surprise. Two researchers practiced with one lure a day individually until each child performed correct verbal and motor responses to all three lures. Training and assessment took place outdoors around the school building. Training was considered complete for a child when the child performed correctly to each of the three lure types within three days. After training, SAAs were conducted in community settings to test generality. Twelve weeks after training, a follow-up SAA again in the community setting was conducted to assess maintenance. Results showed that prior to training, all children displayed unsafe responses. All children responded correctly to the community SAAs after training using all three lures.

The intensity and amount of time needed for each individual child to train in a variety of settings makes it very unlikely that schools could adopt this

method of training. To reach more children, we need simpler, less time consuming programs available for classroom use with multiple children.

Group Training Programs. Many researchers have focused on developing successful group training programs. Poche et al. (1988) evaluated the effectiveness of videos as part of rehearsing a safety training program. The participants consisted of 74 children, 29 in kindergarten and 45 in first grade. The children ranged in age from 5-7 years old. The three different methods evaluated included (1) viewing the videotape and rehearsing correct behaviors toward strangers with the trainer, (2) viewing the videotape only, and (3) the use of a standard law enforcement safety program. The trainer in all groups was a trained law enforcement officer. All children were taught a two-step verbal/motor response of 1) "no, I have to go ask my teacher/mother/father," and 2) run away. Within 48 hours after training, each child was taken outdoors of their school building during school hours for the SAA. Results supported the researchers' hypotheses. The program using the videotape about how to respond to strangers plus correct response rehearsal was the most effective method with 73.7% of the children running away from the unfamiliar adult. Of the children in the video-tape-only group, 47.4% ran away, while 12.5% of the group that received the standard law enforcement program available in some schools ran away.

In this study (Poche et al., 1988), once again the SAA gave a better picture of how children would react in a real-life situation. The videotape and

behavior rehearsal was very effective in teaching children to protect themselves from strangers. Thus, simpler, more standardized methods of teaching self-protection in a classroom are possible. One drawback in this study is that children's anxiety levels were not evaluated. It is possible that teaching the children to "run away" from strangers led the children to feel scared or fearful of people in general.

Carroll-Rowan and Miltenberger (1994) compared two different abduction prevention programs with preschoolers. Sixty-two children, ages 4-5, participated. Three classrooms of children were used with two groups receiving training. One class saw a video similar to the video in the study by Poche et al. (1988) along with behavioral training or role-play led by their teacher. The other class received teacher training using a manual, which described in words the same abduction scenarios that were shown on the tape. The children completed three sessions in one week using the specified method. Behaviorally, children were taught to say "no" and to run 10 feet back toward their parent within five seconds of a presented lure. After training, children were interviewed at home to determine self-report abilities of how the child would react in an SAA. One week after training, a SAA was conducted in a public place. Results of the self-report knowledge measure showed that the manual training group scored highest. Still, several children in both the manual and video groups did not learn the safety skills.

A similar but more complicated study by Holcombe et al. (1995) evaluated 46 children in Head Start, ages 3-4 years. All children were taught by teachers to move away from a stranger and go to a teacher within 3 seconds of a presented lure, to say "No, I have to ask my parent/teacher," and to report the lure to the adult. Baseline behavioral data using a SAA were taken. During the 6-8 training sessions, each child received at least three SAAs. After criterion behaviors were met, SAAs also occurred two weeks, one month, and two months later. Maintenance lessons were given between SAAs. The SAAs took place at local public places with 24 different people serving as strangers. During instruction, children displayed appropriate behaviors during role-play. Also, although this was not considered important by the researchers, children reacted with appropriate motor behaviors, but at least half did not follow with correct verbal responses.

This study shows encouraging results involving motor behaviors. However, it is not clear as to whether the children learned more from the classroom lesson or from the numerous SAAs that they were subjected to. Overall, the method may be too complex for widespread adoption if the multiple SAAs are needed for the learning to occur. Also, both teachers and children reported becoming very bored with the length and repetitiveness of the program.

In 1987, Fryer et al. evaluated a program that placed an emphasis on not instilling generalized fear of people in the children. Subjects included 44 kindergarten, first and second-graders. This training program included a specific

attempt to first clear up misconceptions children may have had about who is and who isn't a stranger. It also included teaching the children four rules to follow about how to respond to strangers: stay an arm's reach away, don't talk or answer questions, don't take anything, and don't go anywhere. Training took place for eight days in 20 minute time blocks. A knowledge-attitude questionnaire and a behavioral pretest using a SAA at the school were conducted prior to and following training. The results showed that over half of the children failed the pretest SAA, but children participating in the program significantly improved their performance, with 78% of the children in the experimental group refusing to accompany the stranger. A six-month follow-up (Fryer, Kraizer, & Miyoshi, 1987b) of those children who passed the test showed that all children retained their skills and refused the stranger in yet another SAA. Two of the children who had been through the program never learned the self-production skills.

Fryer et al.'s (1987a; 1987b) findings in these studies are the most encouraging discussed so far with children of this age group, particularly because the children were taught to behave in a safe, not fearful manner (e.g. scream, run, etc.). Unfortunately, a program requiring eight 20 minute sessions has limited potential for widespread use.

Developmental Issues

Most researchers studying abduction prevention have used relatively young children when assessing their programs (Poche et al., 1981; Flanagan,

1986; Fryer et al., 1987a; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Poche et al., 1988; Miltenberger et al., 1990; Carroll-Rowan & Miltenberger, 1994; Holcombe et al., 1995). Briggs (1991) argues that what protection programs fail to do is recognize the child's level of cognitive development when creating a program (Briggs, 1991). We need to concentrate more on seeing things from a child's perspective, rather than focusing on what we see and expect as adults.

Different studies have shown that children's concepts of certain words differ, depending on their age. Sena and Smith (1990) showed this to be true using the word "big." Strichartz and Burton (1990) also did a study about the understanding of concepts of children using the words "lies" and "truth." The results of both of these studies showed that older children had a more accurate and complex concept of the words than did the younger children. Young children's cognition can vary from older children's in many ways. For example, very young children believe that a small slender glass can contain more liquid than a short wide glass of the same volume. Similarly, younger children seem to make decisions about what is a lie and what is the truth by comparing a statement with the facts of a story, while older children take the beliefs and intents of the speaker into consideration. It seems possible that younger children may be responding inappropriately to strangers because they do not have an accurate concept of a stranger.

An article that directly pertains to this idea was published by Briggs in 1991. This article looked at the effectiveness of two safety programs developed

in Australia and New Zealand to teach children about several kinds of abuse. Briggs evaluated these programs by comparing 378 children ages 5-8 years who had been through one of the programs with children who had not. The children were tested on several things, including their concepts of "unsafe feelings" and strangers, and their abilities to respond safely to those feelings and to strangers. Overall, the children saw adults as people they could trust, not as "unsafe." Children's fears and unsafe concepts seem to include things such as monsters and other imaginary things. In the eyes of a child, adults are their protectors. Briggs (1991) also found that around the ages of seven or eight, children's fears of imaginary beings changed to fears of being hurt by things occurring in the natural environment, such as accidents, earthquakes, and wrecks. But many still viewed all adults as being safe, except when they dressed up like monsters or are "bad looking." When comparing the responses of those who went through either program to those who did not, Briggs found no differences. The word "unsafe" was generally not associated with people.

Briggs (1991) also looked specifically at children's concept of a stranger. She thinks that the word stranger may be too complex for very young children to understand. She found most young children cannot correctly identify a stranger. Children responded to her questions about strangers using words like evil, monsters, robbers, and other words describing a scary or unattractive appearance. Seventy-three percent of the children she studied had these incorrect concepts of a stranger. Of the seventy-three percent, all claimed they

had never seen a stranger before. All of the children who did have the correct concept of a stranger were in the 8-year-old group. However, not even all of this age group could correctly answer the questions. One goal of Briggs' (1991) study was to show that programs dealing with prevention of child abduction or abuse need to consider the level of cognitive development of the children. This study provides examples of how children may have different concepts about strangers. When we tell children to stay away from strangers, children may be thinking in different terms than adults. This is supported by the fact that most of the children in Briggs' study claimed they had never seen a stranger. Perhaps children are not understanding the adult definition of stranger. This emphasized the need for a clearer and simpler program for abduction prevention.

In 1994, Briggs and Hawkins conducted a follow-up study on a subsample of the children in Briggs' (1991) previous study. One-hundred twenty-six children exposed to the "Protective Behaviors" program were re-interviewed one year later using the same questionnaire used in Briggs' previous study (1991). The children had gone through the program a second time during the year. Results showed that the children's answers showed no improvement from the first interview, with only 30% of the children (the older children) giving safe answers to some of the questions. Overall children did not believe that they had the power to stop adults from touching them, that nice-looking people were alright to leave with when asked, and that they would get in trouble or be punished for not obeying adults. Briggs and Hawkins attributed the poor outcome of the program

to several factors including a lack of parental involvement, a lack of children's ability to transfer learned material to alternate situations, and the use of complex concepts that are not used in a child's every day language.

Briggs and Hawkins (1994b) also re-evaluated New Zealand's "Keeping Ourselves Safe" program by re-interviewing another 117 of the children in the previous study (Briggs, 1991). Although there were gains in self-protection skills directly after this program, still only 53% of the children reported that they could stay safe when approached by strangers who might try to trick them. Also, only 26% continued to show those gains twelve months later.

The gains referred to in these studies (Briggs & Hawkins, 1994a; 1994b) were judged by self-report measures, which, as mentioned previously, have been shown by other researchers to have a low correspondence with children's actual safety behaviors (Flanagan, 1986; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Miltenberger et al., 1990).

Yarmey and Rosenstein (1988) looked at the safety knowledge levels of 68 children, ages 5 (n=22), 8 (n=22) and 12 (n=24) years. Results showed that all children were knowledgeable about strangers; however, the age of the child was related to his/her accuracy of the definition of stranger. Five-year-olds were significantly less aware of strangers than the 8 or 12-year-olds, and only 45% of each group defined a stranger to be someone they did not know. This is an important point that is consistent with Briggs' (1991) findings with very young

children. Very young children seem to have less knowledge about what a stranger is or have a less accurate definition of the word than older children.

Child Anxiety

Some authors of previous child abduction research have recognized the need to insure their child protection program did not cause anxiety for the children in their study (Fryer et al., 1987a; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Miltenberger et al., 1990; Carroll-Rowan & Miltenberger, 1994). Kraizer (1986) stated that researchers need to “. . . prevent abuse and abduction without sacrificing the very children we mean to protect. . .” (p. 261). However, few have actually measured anxiety levels in children. Past research has primarily relied on either parental report of specific anxious behaviors in the child following training (e.g., nightmares, being more cautious around people, etc.), or on observations of anxious behaviors illicited by the child during training (Fryer et al., 1987a; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Miltenberger et al., 1990; Carroll-Rowan & Miltenberger, 1994). Parent questionnaires sent home to assess child anxiety are not always returned for a complete follow-up assessment.

Ideally, anxiety should be measured through the children's reports; however, there are few scales available that measure anxiety in children, and none seem to be appropriate for use with very young children. The researcher in this study phoned parents after their child had completed training to ask open-ended questions regarding anxiety or changes in behavior following training and to insure that all children had been included in the assessment.

Current Study

After reviewing past research on programs for abduction prevention with children, what appears to be needed are brief training programs that teach simple, non-anxiety-producing rules to follow. Research has not yet addressed the possibility that use of the term stranger may make it more difficult for children to learn safe behaviors. When adults tell children to stay away from strangers, what do we really mean? Adults may be expecting too much of children to be able to discriminate between a good stranger and a bad stranger. Effective methods must teach children to protect themselves while still allowing them to do things such as obey new teachers at school or go with the nurse at the doctor's office. What adults really want is for children to not leave with somebody their caretaker (parent/teacher) does not know.

The first goal of the current study was to test whether a simple one-rule program that may be easily implemented in any school setting by any adult could produce safer behaviors in children. The second goal was to determine whether a program that avoids the word stranger might be more effective than a program that incorporates the term stranger. Children were taught how to decide whether they "know" somebody. Using pictures of known and unknown adults, children were taught that if they do not know a person, they should leave and ask their caretaker (parent/teacher) before they agree to leave anywhere with the person. Previous programs have taught children specific verbal responses to the stranger (Poche et al., 1981; Poche et al., 1988; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988;

Fryer et al., 1987a; Gast et al., 1993; Miltenberger et al., 1990; Carroll-Rowan & Miltenberger, 1994). However, more recent research has revealed that children more readily learn the motor response of moving themselves from the situation (Holcombe et al., 1995). This study focused less on a required verbal response and focused more on teaching the rule that they must ask a familiar adult before they leave with an unfamiliar adult. Following this rule would result in a child using the motor response of going to a familiar adult to ask, rather than the more dramatic and potentially anxiety producing response of running from the stranger. A final goal was to monitor child anxiety through a follow-up parental report within two to three weeks of the simulated abduction attempt.

CHAPTER III

Methods

Participants

Fifty-one children of kindergarten and first grade age volunteered to participate. All children were enrolled at Clarksville Academy, a private school located in Clarksville, Tennessee. Whole classrooms were approached, and parental consent was obtained by sending a letter to the parents (Appendix A) to obtain informed consent (Appendix B). Upon receiving consent from all parents, classrooms were assigned to one of two training groups or a no-training control group, with care being taken to include both kindergartners and first graders in each group. Non-participating children in each class were allowed by teachers to engage in other activities during the class lesson.

Materials

Experimental Training Group. Polaroids of people within and outside of the preschool system that were either known or unknown to the children were used for training. Thumbtacks and a bulletin board were used for an interactive lesson using the photos. Ideas about people children do not know were taught to the experimental group and were borrowed or modified from previous research (Kraizer, Fryer, & Miller, 1988), and others were developed based on common misconceptions children appear to have about strangers (Briggs, 1991). The main theme of the lesson for the experimental group was "Always ask

before you go,” and all discussions and training centered around that theme.

The statements used with the experimental group were as follows:

1. You don't know most people, but most of them are nice.
2. You can't tell by looking who is a nice person.
3. Mean people and nice people can look the same.
4. Some people might say things to get you to go with them.
5. Never talk to someone or leave with someone unless you have permission from a grown-up you know.

Training Control Group. The lesson for the training control group differed from the experimental training group only in terms of the terminology that was used. While the experimental training group's lesson focused on “people you don't know,” the training control group's lesson focused on “strangers.” The main theme of the lesson for the control group was “Always ask before you go with a stranger,” and all statements and training centered around that theme.

The statements used with this group were as follows:

1. Even though you don't know strangers, most strangers are nice.
2. You can't tell by looking who is a nice stranger.
3. Mean strangers and nice strangers can look the same.
4. Some strangers might say things so get you to go with them.
5. Never talk to a stranger or leave with a stranger unless you have permission first.

No-Training Control Group. This group received no training prior to the simulated abduction attempt, but was later included in a class lesson.

Anxiety Measure. Parents of children in the two training groups were contacted within two to three weeks of the abduction simulation to follow up on any anxiety or behavior changes in their children. Parents were asked the following questions, some of which are similar to those asked by Miltenberger and Thiesse-Duffy (1988):

1. What changes, if any, have occurred in your child's behavior since the training?
2. Since the training, has your child seemed anxious or scared around people in general? Explain.
3. Since the training, how does your child act around people he/she doesn't know?

Procedures

The classrooms with participating children were assigned to one of the three groups. The training took place in a group setting at the school for each group. The experimental training group was taught the rule of "Always ask before you go." The first lesson attempted to teach children what it means to know somebody. There was a short discussion about who are people that the children know (e.g. parents, teachers, friends they see every day, people their parents do things with often). Children were also taught by holding up pictures of people they know and don't know, telling the children which group each person

fell under, and involving the children interactively by asking them what they should do if each person asked the child to go with him/her. Children were told that they should not go with a person they do not know. Subsequently, children were taught that if they don't know the person, "Always ask before you go" and ask an adult they know. This was done by having the children decide and place the pictures on a bulletin board under the category of "OK" or "Ask" (designated by pictures of a child going with the person, or going to ask an adult), depending on whether they knew the person or not. Children received feedback during this activity. There was a discussion about each statement while always focusing on the "Always ask before you go" rule. Last, each child received an opportunity to practice with the researcher what he/she should do when asked to go with someone. Any incorrect responses were corrected.

The program was similar for the training control group. This group received a discussion about who are strangers. Polaroids were used with this group, with the researcher holding up each picture, stating whether the person was a stranger, and asking the children what they should do if those people asked the children to go with them. Subsequently, children were taught "Always ask before you go with a stranger." This was done by having the children decide and place the pictures on a bulletin board under a category of "OK" or "Ask" (designated by pictures of a child going with the person, or going to ask an adult), depending on whether the person was a stranger or not. There was a discussion with the children about each statement of the lesson. Discussion

about the statements repeatedly referred to the rule "Always ask before you go with a stranger." Each child in this group also had an opportunity to act out what they should do if asked to leave with a stranger.

Approximately ten days after training, a simulated abduction attempt (SAA) was carried out at the school to assess the children's behaviors toward strangers. The children were taken outside, one by one, and told they were going to help the researcher by learning some new games, an idea borrowed from Poche et al. (1988). Each child was asked to run, play ring toss, and do jumping jacks. During the ring toss game, the researcher told the child that she had left something inside, and that he/she should practice the game while she retrieves it. Then she stood just inside the school doors and watched as her assistant, the stranger, approached the child. The stranger was played by one of several female assistants who were APSU students or good friends of the researcher. As borrowed from previous research methods (Fryer et al., 1987a), the stranger told each child she was a teacher from another school who was there to do a puppet show that day, and that she really needed help carrying in the materials from her car into the building. She asked each child up to three times to go with her, using three different lures. For instance, lures included asking the child to help, telling the child it would only take a minute and possibly promising the child a puppet, and stating that the teacher said it was okay. If the child went, the assistant walked a few feet away with the child, and then remembered she was suppose to go to the office in the main building first. The

child was thanked and returned to the game. If the child refused the assistant after three tries, the stranger thanked the child, stated that she would find someone in the office to help, and left. The researcher then returned to the child and finished the games.

In regards to scoring, the children's behaviors on the SAA were measured on a three point basis:

0 = went with stranger

1 = refused but did not move from stranger (toward building or known adult).

2 = moved away from stranger (toward building or known adult).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Sixty-seven permission slips were sent home to parents, and 80% of those were returned. Three children were unable to complete the study due to their absences. Of the 51 participants, thirty-five were males, and sixteen were females. Twenty-three of the children were in kindergarten and 28 were in first grade. The control group consisted of 10 kindergartners and 10 first graders (14 males, 6 females), the training control group consisted of 7 kindergartners and 9 first graders (10 males, 6 females), and the experimental training group consisted of 6 kindergartners and 9 first graders (11 males, 4 females). In terms of ethnicity, 50 participants were Caucasian, and 1 participant was African American.

The results of the simulated abduction attempt (SAA) are shown in Table 1. A chi square test of independence showed that the children's scores on the SAA significantly varied across groups $\chi^2(4, N = 51) = 17.77, p = .001$. Both the training control group and the experimental training group did significantly better on the SAA than the no-training control group. Sixty-five percent of the children in the no-training control group walked away with the stranger on the SAA, whereas only 12.5% of the training control group and 13% of the experimental training group went with the stranger. There was no significant difference in scores between the two training groups $\chi^2(2, N = 31) = 2.09, p = .35$. Many children in both training groups refused the stranger, but they did not

Table 1.

Frequencies Of SAA Scores By Group

GROUP	SCORE		
	0	1	2
No-Training Control	13 (65%)	5 (25%)	2 (10%)
Experimental Training	2 (12.5%)	7 (43.8%)	7 (43.8%)
Training Control	2 (13%)	10 (66.6%)	3 (20%)

Note: 0 = went with stranger, 1 = refused but stayed near stranger, 2 = moved away from stranger.

proceed to move away from the stranger toward the school building or toward a teacher as they were taught in the lesson. Forty-four percent of the children in the experimental training group moved away from the stranger and went toward the building while 20% in the training control group went toward the building.

Results showed no differences in SAA scores between males and females $\chi^2(2, N = 51) = .79, p = .67$. Likewise, kindergartners and first graders did not differ on SAA scores $\chi^2(2, N = 51) = .09, p = .96$. In other words, males did not react significantly different from females, and kindergartners did not react significantly different from the first graders toward the stranger.

Parental follow-up reports suggest that the training succeeded in not causing the children undue fear or anxiety regarding people in general. In general, parents stated they had not noticed any changes in their children's behavior since the training and SAA, that their children did not appear to be more nervous or anxious around people in general since the training and SAA, and that their children did not appear to act noticeably differently around people they did not know (although many parents added that their children had not actually had much opportunity to be around people they don't know). Six parents stated that their child mentioned the training lesson, three children even mentioned the "lady that needed help with the puppets" at school. All but one parent of these children stated, however, that their child did not appear anxious or frightened when discussing what happened at school. One mother stated that her child told her about the "lady at his school who wanted him to go to her car,"

and the mother stated that her son seemed "concerned" or "slightly bothered" by the experience of the SAA. However, she added that he has not seemed anxious since his reporting it, and she stated she was glad her child had participated. The parents whose children mentioned the SAA indicated that their child seemed to simply speak about the topic matter-of-factly. Most parents added that they were appreciative that their child could participate.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study had several purposes. One was to examine whether a simple, one-session, one-rule abduction prevention program could effectively teach small groups of children to respond appropriately to the lures of a stranger. Results indicated that the program worked in keeping many of the children from leaving with a stranger. It appears that using a rule with such simplicity as "Always ask before you go" was effective in training the children, even when presented only during a one-time 30 minute group session. A second focus was to examine whether a program that avoided using the term stranger would be more effective than the same program that used the term stranger. It has been found in the past (Briggs, 1991) that most children have misconceptions about strangers. It was hypothesized in this study that introducing the term stranger to children may bring up these misconceptions, causing confusion such that children have difficulty deciding with whom they can or cannot leave. However, the results of this study showed that the scores of the two training groups did not significantly differ from one another.

Previous research has found that the majority of untrained children, ranging from 60% to 96%, leave with the stranger in the context of a SAA. (Poche, et al., 1981; Fryer et al., 1987a; Flanagan, 1988; Miltenberger & Thiesse-Duffy, 1988; Poche, et al., 1988; Miltenberger, et al., 1990; Carroll-Rowan & Miltenberger, 1994; Holcombe, et al., 1995). In this study, 65% of the untrained

children agreed to leave with the stranger. This percentage is lower than that found in many studies; however, several factors may have contributed to this finding. First, it is possible that due to several well publicized child abductions in the year prior to this study, parents may have been discussing the topic with their children. Several parents of these children reported that since the recent local abductions, they have been bombarding their children with information and warnings about strangers.

A second possibility could be differences in the appearance/approach of the strangers. Four different strangers were used for the SAAs. The first assistant tended to be particularly shy and did, in fact, report when she was finished that she felt anxious and guilty about trying to lure children. The children who were approached by this stranger may have been able to pick up on her nervousness or apprehension, possibly affecting their response. The other three strangers appeared much more outgoing and relaxed, and tended to spend more time attempting to talk to and persuade the child to go to the car. Five of the initial 8 children (63%) tested by the first stranger said "no" to her. Whereas only 2 (16%) of the 12 remaining control group children refused one of the other three strangers. Given this initial outcome, finding a significant difference between the control group and the two training groups is even more encouraging.

The results of this study have several important implications. First, the findings indicate that a short, one time, simple, and very inexpensive program can be used in group settings to effectively teach children abduction prevention.

An effective program of this type has not previously been reported in the research literature. Second, when teaching children to protect themselves, it appears it may be effective to avoid using tactics that scare children or teach them to run from a stranger. In both training lessons, children were taught, instead, that if a person asks them to go with her, to always ask permission before they go. The children were told that it may or may not be important for them to go with the person, so they simply need to ask whoever is taking care of them at the time if it is okay. This response would be valuable, for example, when parents do need for someone else to pick their child up from school, or when the child needs to go with an unfamiliar person at school, at the doctor's office, etc. We would not want a child to "run away" in situations such as those. We do not want children to be frightened or anxious about going with all unknown adults; however, we also do not want them to feel that they should readily go with an unfamiliar adult just because they are in a setting where they feel comfortable or safe. This is also important in order to preserve basic socialization skills, and because there are times when children need to go with unfamiliar adults. Teaching them to simply ask first could avoid this issue and may lessen the confusion of making the choice themselves.

A third implication of the finding in this study was that the lesson appeared to teach children to protect themselves without scaring them. Parental reports after the training and the SAA revealed that there were no changes in the children's behaviors toward people in general or people they do not know.

Overall, parents reported that their child was no more anxious or scared around people than they might have been before the training. Most parents noticed no differences in their child whatsoever. Two parents stated that they noticed that their children would stay within their view more and ask more before going somewhere. For example, one father stated that his son is generally a very friendly, trusting boy who would not generally ask permission to go play with another child. He stated that while on a camping trip he was surprised when a friend asked his son to go play in an area out of his father's view, and his son came to ask permission to go with the child first. Most parents stated that they were appreciative and thanked the researcher for introducing the lesson to their child.

Although the results of this study are encouraging, there were several limitations to the study. First was in regards to the many children refusing the stranger, but failing to walk away towards the school or a known adult. Most of these children did report to the stranger that they needed to ask first; however, many did not follow through with leaving to ask, but instead waited for the researcher to return from the building, and then asked her. There are three possible explanations for this finding. Since many children asked the researcher when she returned if they could go with the stranger, the children may have felt comfortable in that the researcher would quickly return as she stated she would. Had those children not been expecting the researcher's quick return, it is possible that they would have left to ask. It is also possible that the children felt

a responsibility to help the researcher and practice the “game” they were playing. This game only served as an excuse to take the child outside; however, the children, of course, were not aware of the intent. One child even stated, “No, I’m suppose to be playing this game.” It could be that these children felt a responsibility or felt they had to practice and do well on the game before the researcher returned, thus making them less willing to help the stranger. Third, it may not have been emphasized enough in the lesson that the children were to “go ask” immediately after a stranger’s request to go somewhere. Some children may have thought they could wait for a known adult to appear before they asked. The importance of the immediate motor response needs to be made clearer during training.

It would be important to consider many of these issues when conducting further research in this area. Suggestions for future research with this training include: a) focusing more on the behavioral response of leaving to ask an adult-children should be taught to immediately leave to ask, and not simply wait for a known adult to appear before asking, b) during the SAA putting less emphasis on practicing the “game” so that the children are less likely to feel responsible to do well, c) considering the characteristics of the “strangers” used in the SAAs, and d) conducting several follow-up SAAs after training to evaluate maintenance of the learned skills. Research which considers these issues may bring us one step closer to learning how to more easily and effectively teach children to protect themselves from the lures of people who might want to harm them.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the psychology department at Austin Peay State University under the direction of Dr. Nanci Woods. This semester I am doing research on what I think to be a very important issue: the issue of children and strangers. As you well know, in today's society, teaching children to react appropriately to strangers is a must. However, studies with young children show that there are few simple methods available that parents or teachers can use with several children at a time. Studies show that children without training about how to respond to a stranger's lure will almost always leave with a stranger when asked—even some who have been told before not to go with strangers. I am interested in trying to find a simple teaching method that may work to better protect your children from strangers who may be dangerous. I am also interested in trying to use a method that does not use scare tactics to teach your child.

In order to study this important issue, I am in need of volunteers to help. This research has been thoroughly examined and approved by Mrs. Hunt and Mrs. Bell, and your child's teachers are cooperating with me in this task. If you agree to volunteer, your child would go through two phases.

In phase I, with the cooperation of your child's school and teacher, your child may be selected to receive a lesson about strangers along with other

classmates. If your child is chosen, the lesson would take less than an hour. During this time, your child would receive the lesson about strangers, would be asked to answer questions about strangers, and would practice how to respond correctly when someone asks your child to go with them.

Phase II would be a test to determine if your child could now react appropriately to strangers. This test has been done numerous times by major researchers of child abduction prevention. The test would take place during school hours, with the cooperation and supervision of your child's school staff. I would take your child outside onto the playground or other school grounds and tell your child I am teaching him/her some new games. During one of the games, I will pretend to have forgotten something and run back into the building to get it, leaving your child to play the games while I closely watch from inside the school. **Your child will never be left alone outside the school building.** As soon as I go inside, an assistant working with me would walk up to your child to see your child's reactions to her. **Your child would not actually be taken away, and in no way would your child be threatened by the assistant,** but his/her responses to the assistant will be recorded to see what your child would do when the unknown lady asks your child to go with her. I will be watching your child from inside the school and will come back outside after I see the test is over. A teacher or teacher's aide at your child's school may also be observing this test (from a place where they cannot be seen by your child) to be there if your child becomes uncomfortable. This test is carried out in such a way that

your child may not even realize they are being tested by the female. This test will take only a few minutes, and your child would be returned back to his/her classroom.

If your child is chosen to receive a lesson about strangers, about one week after the test to see if my training worked, I would contact you by telephone and ask you a few questions about your child's reactions and behaviors since the training. Your phone number will be kept confidential, and results of my study will not use your child's name.

If your child is not chosen to receive a lesson about strangers during this time (because I need a comparison group that initially receives no training), I would return to your child's school and give him/her the lesson after the study. I think this study is very important so that we may be able to teach our children how to effectively protect themselves from people who may want to harm them. Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Your child's school and teacher are both cooperating with me in this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call Mrs. Hunt or Mrs. Bell, or you can contact me at 551-4450, or my supervisor, Dr. Nanci Woods, at the Austin Peay State University Psychology Department (648-7233).

Thank you,

Elizabeth Hartman

P.S. If you agree to participate, please do not talk with your child about strangers or what will happen to them in the study until it is completed.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT
Austin Peay State University
Clarksville, Tennessee 37044

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form is designed to provide you with information about this study and to answer any of your questions.

1. TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY

Teaching Children Abduction Prevention : Strangers vs. People We Don't Know.

2. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Elizabeth Hartman, Graduate Student, Psychology Department, Austin Peay State University; Clarksville, TN, (615) 551-4450.

3. FACULTY SUPERVISOR

Nanci Stewart Woods, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Psychology Department, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN, (615) 648-7236.

4. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This study will attempt to teach children not to go with strangers by using a simple program that may be presented to groups. The ability for children to protect themselves from strangers is important, since research has found that nearly all children who are not trained in abduction prevention will leave with a stranger when asked. Because it is important to begin abduction prevention training at an early age, elementary schools may be an appropriate place to introduce the idea to children. This research will also investigate whether avoiding the term stranger, which is probably confusing to children, will make it easier to teach small children appropriate safety behaviors.

5. PROCEDURES FOR THIS RESEARCH

Your child will be selected to be in one of three groups—a group that receives a lesson about “strangers,” a group that receives a lesson about “people they don’t know,” or a group that initially receives no training (a comparison group). If your child is selected to receive one of the two training programs about strangers, he/she will be asked to listen, answer questions, and role play with the researcher about what to do if approached by a stranger or someone they don’t know. Approximately one week after training, your child will be tested individually on his/her ability to refuse the lure of a researcher who plays the role of a stranger. During this simulated abduction attempt, children will be taken outside of the school and told they are there to play some games

with the researcher. During the games, the researcher will claim to have to return to the building to retrieve something she forgot, and your child will be asked to play the games while she retrieves it. When the researcher steps inside the school, she will watch as an assistant, well-known to the researcher, approaches your child with a non-threatening lure to go with her to see your child's reactions. **YOUR CHILD WILL NEVER BE THREATENED BY THE ASSISTANT OR LEAVE THE PLAYGROUND WITH THE ASSISTANT.** A teacher or teacher's aide at your child's school may also be observing this test (from a place where they cannot be seen by your child) to be there if your child becomes uncomfortable. If your child was chosen and received a lesson about strangers before the test, I will contact you within two weeks of the test to ask you questions about any changes in your child's behavior since the training. If your child is not chosen to receive the lesson about strangers during this time, your child will still be approached by the researcher to determine his/her response to a request to go with the researcher to help her do something. This step is necessary to help us determine whether the responses of the children who received training are better than those of children who did not. If your child is chosen to be in the group that does not receive one of the programs, I will be glad to return to the school to give your child's class the lesson after this study is completed.

6. POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOUR CHILD

Possible risks to your child may include anxiety or behavioral changes related to fear of strangers or unknown adults in social situations. Your child may also become embarrassed if his/her behaviors are corrected during training. However, all training and assessment will be done in a non-threatening way, and your child may stop at any time, and the researcher will stop if she feels your child is scared or anxious.

7. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU OR OTHERS

Many parents believe that their children would not leave with an unknown adult without permission. However, previous research on child abduction prevention programs show that almost all children without training will leave with an unknown adult when asked. The information your child will gain from this activity and the presentation given will assist them in protecting themselves from potential abductors and teach them social safety. You may also benefit by learning strategies you can practice later with your child that may help them.

7. INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

I agree for my child to participate in the present study being conducted by Elizabeth Hartman, a graduate student of the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University, and her supervisor, Nanci Stewart Woods, Ph.D. I have been informed in writing of the procedures to be followed and about any discomfort which may be involved. Ms. Hartman has offered to answer any

further inquiries that I may have regarding the procedures, and she can be contacted by phone (551-4450), or I may contact Dr. Nanci Woods in the Department of Psychology, Austin Peay State University (648-7236). I understand that I am free to terminate my and my child's participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from my child withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my child's participation.

NAME (please print)

CHILD'S NAME (please print)

SIGNATURE / DATE

PHONE