

Survival for Children and Adolescents

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Introduction

The years from early childhood through late teens are fraught with dangers. Young people are more vulnerable to deliberate and accidental threats to their physical and emotional survival and have no experience or training to protect themselves. Children born into strong, healthy families and safe and stable communities have some protection and guidance, but are still vulnerable. Those who are less fortunate are more subject to abuse, assault, deception and life destroying errors in judgment. Today's youth are set to face increasing levels of economic and social chaos as well as more frequent and severe natural and manmade disasters in the coming decades. **Helping our youth to survive physically, mentally and morally is critical to the survival of a free society in the future.** In this article we will provide some basic guidance and information for parents, guardians and the youth for surviving a variety of threat situations.

Home Accidents and Emergencies

Thousands of children are injured or die each year from preventable home accidents. Other children suffer from physical and emotional abuse from the very parents, relatives and other adults that should be protecting them. It is the responsibility of adults to provide a safe environment, be aware of potentially hazardous conditions in the home and act immediately when evidence of child-abuse is observed. Establish clear and reasonable safety rules and emergency procedures for all family members.

Home Fires

Never leave young children at home alone. Children are often fascinated by fire and may accidentally start a blaze and try to put it out by themselves. Children are injured, trapped die like this every year. Never leave matches, lighters or other ignition devices lying about where children can get to them. Teach children to get out of the house and call 911 or go to the neighbors if there is a fire. Adolescence can be taught to use a fire extinguisher and to evacuate younger children if you're not home. Never lock children in when you are not home. They must be able to escape a fire.



Home Intruders and Invasions

Intruders may enter the home while the family is asleep, commit a home invasion or enter while no one is there. They may intend to abduct children, commit robbery or other crimes. Parents must train the children on what to do.

If there is an intruder in the house at night they should quickly gather in the parents room or designated safety spot and wait for the police (called by parents) they should never go looking for the intruder. If they cannot get to the safety spot, they must have a place to hide.

If a forced entry is made by an intruder the child may lock and barricade there rooms, escape out a backdoor or window to call the police or hide in a cabinet or other location.

If the child or adolescent comes home to find that the home has been or may have been entered, teach them not to go inside. They should get away from the house and call 911 and/or go to a neighbor immediately for help.

Be aware that parents who are involved in any kind of illegal activities or who associate with gang members and drug users are far more likely to attract home invasions and other forms of violence that may harm children.

Children and Firearms

Firearms ownership is a serious responsibility. This is especially true in any home where children live or may visit. If you are not fully committed to keeping firearms access out of the reach of children and adolescence in your home don't have them. Children have shot themselves, their siblings and others with firearms that were "hidden" by parents. All children (at home and visiting) are extremely good at searching and finding. In a drawer, under a cushion, on a high shelf, behind a cabinet – they will find it! All firearms should be kept in a securely locked gun box and the keys must be very well hidden. Your self-defense gun(s) must be secured in a combination lockbox or with a trigger lock at home. Ammunition and firearms should be stored separately. Adolescence should be taught how to use firearms safely, but never permitted to handle them without adult supervision. Even if you

do not have children at home, be sure to lock up all firearms when children or adolescence will be visiting.

Other Hazards to Children

Tripping hazards that may injure you are even more dangerous to children so keep stairs and walkways clear, Children can climb on or over railings, fall off of porches and through window screens. The installation of window and stairway guards and gates is recommended wherever such hazards exist. Small children have drowned on buckets full of water. Never leave children unattended in bath tubs or pools of any kind. Larger backyard swimming pools must be fenced and locked when not supervised. Poisons such as drain cleaners, and paint thinners must be kept out of reach of children. The same applies to prescription and over-the-counter medications. Flammable liquids such as gasoline, lamp oil and solvents are hazardous as drugs (huffed) poisons and fire accelerants and must be kept in secure locked cabinets. Obviously knives, saws, axes and other sharp objects must be kept out of reach of younger children. Handles of pans of boiling or frying food must be kept inward so they cannot be grasp by children. The same goes for dangling cords on hot electrical appliances such as coffeemakers and broilers.



Call 911!

All children should be taught how to call 911 at the earliest possible age. They should be told to do so if anyone in the house is seriously injured or unconscious, or if there is an intruder or attempted break-in, a fire or they are hurt. Tell them to give their name, age and describe the problem to the dispatcher and to follow the instruction of the dispatcher.

Dangers on the Streets

Sad to say, but our streets are no-longer safe for children. Child abductions, gang activities, drug pushing and violence are not restricted to urban communities. Suburban and rural areas have their own variations on these dangers. Parents and young people living in so-called “safe neighborhoods” are inclined to become complacent and easy targets for criminals.

Recognition of Child Abuse (including bullying and cyber bullying)

Children may be molested or abused at home, at school or in other places by adults or other children abuse may include sexual molestation, physical injury, emotional cruelty or bullying. Since the sources of abuse may include parents, and other caretakers it is the responsibility of all adults to be alert for signs of abuse in children with whom they interact. Signs of abuse include: children who are never outside or allowed to play with others. Children who show signs of frequent injury and/or flinch or seem fearful of adults. Indications of malnutrition and illness. Children that are unusually quiet and inactive. Of course some injuries are just accidents and some behaviors are just child moods, but multiple and ongoing signs of possible abuse should initiated further investigation and reporting. Be suspicious if your child talks about spending time with an older person or receiving gifts from or having secrets with an adult. Your children should be told not to go into private locations or take gifts from any adults without your permission in advance. Listen, believe and investigate when your children tell you about inappropriate touching or suspicious action by adults, even if it's a relative or someone you know.

Preventing Child Abduction

Small children are easy prey for child molesters and abductors. They may be lured into a nearby home by a sex offender or snatched off the street. Abductors are extremely clever at misleading children. They may say they need help finding a puppy or they may say that a parent has been hurt and they will take the child to them. A teenage girl recently disappeared from a shopping mall. Shopping mall video later showed her meekly walking out of the crowded mall with her abductor, never to be seen alive again! Abductors may just want the child to get close enough to be grabbed. They may ask for directions from their car or van and then pull them in when they get close. Children should know that adults do not ask children for help. They should stay out of reach of strangers at all times.

Be aware that most child abductors are not strangers. They can be family members or acquaintances from home or school. Teach your children never-ever to go anywhere with anyone they do not know, but also not to go anywhere with any adult (even ones they know) without your permission. Train them to firmly say "no" and scream, run or fight. No matter what they say, don't go anywhere with strangers or anyone without your knowledge and assent. Do not get into a vehicle or take anything from strangers. Stay in crowds and stay in groups. Avoid being alone and avoid being in empty places.

The police are not going to throw a lot of resources into a missing child unless (1) it has been over 24-hours or (2) there are other factors such as weather, disability, custody issues, and threats of violence or evidence of violence or abduction. Ninety-nine percent of "missing children" turn up within one-to-two days. After that the chances of recovery become much less. Children over the age of consent cannot be forced to return even if found by police. If you are sure something is wrong report it to the police and then start checking with the child's friends and at places where they may hangout or be in danger. If you can't locate the child within

a day or you find information indicating abduction, molestation, injury or illness get back to the police immediately.

Recognition and Prevention of Bullying

Bullying can take many forms. Individuals or gangs may use intimidation or physical violence to force a child to join a gang, take drugs or be involved in other high-risk activities. Children may choose to “pick on” a child because he or she is different or does not conform. The internet and social media are new routes for bullying. So-called Cyberbullying is real and can cause lasting psychological harm and even suicide in sensitive children and adolescence. Young people are particularly sensitive about their appearance and their social status. Be alert for signs of injury, depression or changes in behavior, such as skipping school or isolation that may indicate bullying. Children may be ashamed to tell you that they let someone intimidate or injury them or that they are afraid. The best defense against psychological bullying is the child’s own sense of pride and self-worth. Being an important part of a family and knowing they have support and can talk about issues is critical. Any signs of physical injury or organized bullying should be reported to the police and/or school officials promptly.

Parental Awareness and Responsibility

Parents must be constantly observant of their children’s behavior. Poor attendance at school or poor grades may indicate depression, drug usage or association with gang members. Frequently coming home late or sneaking out should initiate investigation. Flashing gang signs, secretive behavior or indications of drug usage must require immediate intervention. You are responsible for assuring that your children do not make serious, life damaging choices. Adolescent brains are not fully developed and young people lack the benefits of experience and observation necessary to make good decisions. You must be their guide and leader towards responsible and productive adulthood. You cannot just be their pall and hope for the best. Regardless of the situations’ or temptations’, loved and confident, self-reliant children are much less likely to do drugs, join gangs, run away or commit suicide. They are survivors in emergencies and successful in life.

Preventing Accidental Injuries and Deaths

Young people are often over-confident and more prone to taking chances than adults. The possibility of being seriously injured or killed is not highly developed. Trying new things and pushing their luck is more normal than being careful and safe. Today we have earbuds and smartphones to completely distract and screen young people from danger around them. Young people (and adults) are robbed, assaulted, struck by vehicles and experience collisions and falls because they were unaware of their surroundings. These tragedies can and should be prevented. Devices that obstruct or distract from complete audio and visual

awareness of the immediate surrounding can be used only when they are (1) stationary and (2) in a safe environment. Using such devices while biking, walking, skating or driving must be strictly prohibited. Even standing near to traffic, railroad tracks or in a location where they may attract criminals should be avoided. Be sure to provide your children with protective gear for whatever sports or activities they are involved in. Bicyclists should be provided with good fitting helmets and high visibility clothing. If they ride at night they should have reflective clothing and their bike should have reflectors as well as lights.



Avoiding and Surviving Shooting Incidents

While drive-by shootings and gang shootouts are more common in urban areas, they can happen anywhere without warning. Shooting incidents happen far more frequently between adolescents and where young people congregate. Victims are often gang members, but just as often they are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. The first priority in preventing your child from being involved in such incidents is to keep them out of gangs and keep them away from association with gang members. They also need to stay away from locations and parties where gang members are likely to hangout. The parent and community must provide alternative associations, activities and locations. As always: you must have a continuing dialogue with your children about associations and activities. Teach your children to avoid association with anyone who carries a gun or brags about shooting someone. Children should be taught that if they hear shooting, do not go to see what's happening, but must get down or take cover quickly. If they think there is going to be shooting, get away fast. If shooting starts they should get behind any solid object (wall, car, etc.) and/or get flat and stay down until the police arrive. Do not run towards or away from police, just stay down and show your empty hands and follow their exact instructions.

Hazards at School

Young people are subject to a tremendous amount of hazards while in school. They spend much more time interacting with their peers than with their parents. What seems to be acceptable within their group may be high-risk behavior with potentially disastrous

consequences. Their desire to want to fit in supersedes good judgment. They seek leadership and a sense of belonging. Saying no and being different takes courage and determination for them. Home, family and established values are their only defense. I have heard a parent say “I don’t understand my child, he never listens”. You are the one that needs to be listening! They need to feel comfortable talking to you. It’s your job to get them through school safely and without making poor decisions and associations. School hazards include, bullying, gangs recruitment, drug pushers, assaults, and abuse. In recent years incidents of so-called “active shooters” have also been more frequent.

Active Shooters Survival for Youth

A child or young adult may encounter an active shooter situation at school, in a public place or even on the street. Young people must be encouraged to report anyone in school who talks about shooting, killing, revenge or having guns or bombs. They should be trained to immediately report sighting a firearm being carried into the school by a student or faculty. At the first sign of a potential shooting incident or upon hearing shots fired they should know what to do. The school may have a plan for a shooting incident, but in all cases the child should know where to take cover if evacuation is not possible. Quickly getting out of sight if possible behind solid walls or appliances is the next best option to escape. Barricading the door in a room is another way to stay safe. If these are not available choices then lying flat and playing dead may be their only chance. Running or just standing in place is an invitation to being a target in such situations.

Preventing Adolescent Drug Abuse

Adolescents do not think like adults. They are highly susceptible to peer pressure and the need to fit in. In fact, doing just the opposite of smart behavior is usually more appealing. It’s just not enough to assume that a child is “too smart” to try drugs or join a gang. Think. Everyone knew that cigarettes were bad (very bad) for your health, yet generation after generation of youths’ eagerly took up the habit and paid the price of poor health and early death.

Household chemicals such as paint thinner and adhesives can be huffed. Alcohol can be injected inhaled or absorbed in new more intensive ways. Prescription drugs and even some over the counter medications can be abused. Marijuana, heroin, cocaine, and a constantly changing variety of synthetic drugs are out there for your child to try. Drug pushers are experts at tempting young people “all your friends are trying it”, “just try it once” to get them hooked. Addicts desperately need to make more addicts and will intimidate and ostracize any outsiders that do not use. It takes a strong will and a firm awareness that the parents and family are far more important than these losers. Don’t wait. Discuss the dangers of drugs with children in grammar school and continue the discussion each year. Discuss the health and legal consequences and have examples from the news of how people deteriorated physically, committed crimes, ruined lives and often died just because they tried something.

Children and adolescence often follow examples of parents, relatives and other adults. Parents who smoke, drink in excess, use any form of drugs recreationally or tolerate such behavior among friends or associates are encouraging drug experimentation and abuse regardless of what they tell their children. You must set the example before you can prevent this self-destructive behavior.



Surviving Disasters (home, school outdoors)

The frequency and severity of disasters and violent incidents is increasing. Every family should be prepared to cope with emergencies without help if necessary. The parent owes it to his/or her children to assure that there is water, food, shelter, basic first aid supplies and other necessities on hand. Evacuation-Pack should be ready for adults and children as well. As children grow older their level of emergency responsibilities and their equipment should be improved.

School age children should be taught basic first aid including how to recognize signs and symptoms of heart attacks, strokes, hypothermia, hyperthermia, and insulin shock. They should be able to recognize severe versus minor bleeding and how to apply direct pressure and elevation to stop it. Older children should be learn to do CPR and apply tourniquets along with basic bandaging and splinting. Children must know to “stop, drop and role” if they are on fire and to quickly cool (cold water) and cover (sterile bandage) for treating burns.

Lost or Separated Children

Regardless of how vigilant a parent or guardian is, a child can become separated or lost. This may occur at a shopping mall, public event or outdoors. Children should be instructed to stay in one place as soon as they realize they are lost or separated. Retracing your steps or going to the place you last saw them is the best chance for fast recovery. Children should also be instructed to seek out a police officer, security guard, event staff or a store employee for help. They can also blow their whistle to attract help, but should never go with a stranger.

Storms, Tornadoes, Hurricanes, Power Outages

Children and adolescence need to know what to do if they are home alone or away from home when severe storms, earthquakes, floods, power outages and other

disasters occur. They should be instructed on how to escape, find shelter, get to help and survive until you can get to them. They should have increased responsibilities in your family emergency plans as they grow older.



Family Passwords and Codewords

The family should have a special codeword to say “in need help” and a password to use to say “it’s me, a family member” to avoid mistaken shooting or injury in the dark. You may want to have special action-words to activate various emergency plans as well.

Survival Kits for Children and Teens

One of Live Free’s slogans is that “it’s not what you have, it’s what you have with you that counts” Having age appropriate items to aid in emergency situations carried in the child’s pockets or packs can provide lifesaving support in emergencies as well as providing a sense of comfort and self-confidence. **Having their own “survival items” and “survival kits” will develop a preparedness and self-reliant mindset that will serve them well as they mature to adulthood.**

Early childhood survival items would include a whistle, BandAids™, a miniature flashlight, and a child size N95 respirator*. Some packaged, non-perishable (for emergency use only) candy can also impart some comfort. A card containing emergency contact information, the child’s name, address and contact phone numbers, and any medical conditions or required medications should always be carried This card should be sealed in plastic. **DO NOT DEPEND ON CELL PHONES AND APPs for this!**

As children grow older more survival items can be added such as energy bars, light sticks, pepper spray, Mylar survival blankets, bandanas and even tourniquets. More complete survival kits should be created for children and adolescence to take on outdoor activities and there should be a full evacuation pack of appropriate content, size and weight for young family members as well.

About Knives

Up until recent times the possession of a “pocket knife” was a rite-of-passage for boyhood. These were usually small one or two bladed knives. Every boy over the age of

ten had one. They were never used as or considered to be weapons. Today carrying a knife of any sort to school is usually prohibited. A pocket knife, Swiss Army™ knife or multi-tool device is still an essential survival item for non-school pockets and kits, but should come with parental supervision and safety training.

** Fires, tornadoes, chemical incidents and biological hazards all create airborne soot, dust and mists that can be immediately harmful. It is important that children and adolescence have a means to protect themselves from these risks. Child size respirators can be purchased on line. Buy enough to cover an extended (epidemic, etc.) situation and show the child how to properly fit them. Adolescence will be able to use adult size respirators that they carry*



Youth Interaction with Police

Young people must understand that police officers are sworn to enforce the laws and protect the public. Children should be introduced to police officers at an early age and come to see them as sources of safety and help. Violence of any kind is the last resort for a police officer, but when faced with a threat to themselves or others they are obligated to act.



The police do not just go around shooting innocent people walking down the street. Although some police shooting turn out to be overreactions or accidents they were in situations precipitated by the victim's criminal activities and/or failure to promptly obey police commands. If a person appears to be armed, appears to be a threat to others or fails to obey commands the police are justified to use deadly force. **They are not allowed to simply let the offender run off.** For an officer to fail to do everything in their power to detain the suspect is called "failure of duty" and the officer or officers are subject to disciplinary action and possible termination. They are not obligated to try to chase and tackle an offender that may well be faster and stronger than they are. **They are obliged to stop the offender by the most effective means necessary while minimizing the risk of injury to themselves and others.** Actually the way to avoid being shot is pretty simple.

Children and adolescence must be taught the following rules by their parents and guardians

- Don't be involved in criminal activities
- Don't do drugs
- Don't hang-around gangs or act and dress like a gang member
- Don't run when the police say stop
- Don't point things (any things) at the police
- Stop and obey every police order immediately
- And of course: Do not fight or struggle with officers.

Parents and guardians must not tolerate and enable your children's participation in any kind of criminal, gang or drug related activities. Do not tolerate criminal activities or drug usage by friends and family members. Teach them the above rules for avoiding violent police/civilian confrontations. Teach them self-respect, respect for others and respect for the law. Make them safe, responsible and productive citizens. That's your job.



Sources

The material for this article was derived from the author's personal experience and contacts on the Southside of Chicago combined with a survivalist approach to these issues and research materials from a variety of police, medical and child protection organizations.