



## *Nancy Hightshoe Seminars*

# *LifeSkills*

*By Nancy Hightshoe*

### *Your Family Safe, Public Involvement in Criminal Cases & Effective Media Relations*

The attention of families has been riveted on the disappearance of 13-year-old Ben Ownby, then his rescue – along with the almost unbelievable miracle of finding Shawn Hornbeck, who was kidnapped four years ago – in the same apartment. Both the kidnappings and the rescue occurred very close to my home in St. Louis. There has been a great deal of news coverage – including an appearance by yours truly on the St. Louis NBC affiliate talking about how you can keep your family safe. In this LifeSkills, I would like to share with you some tips on how to protect your family, as well as how to respond to any incidents that occur.

#### **AS ADULTS, ARE YOUR CONCERNS REASONABLE?**

Absolutely! There is one predator per square mile in the United States. Do not be fooled into thinking that the authorities know where there are because of the laws mandating their registration. Many offenders have been lost in the system.

FBI statistics indicate a rise in violent crimes – those serious Crimes Against Persons.

Statistically: 1 girl in 4, 1 boy in 8 and 1 woman in 3 will be assaulted.

#### **CAN YOU AND YOUR FAMILY REDUCE THE CHANCES OF BEING A CRIME VICTIM?**

Absolutely. Safety is a family activity. When I presented Keeping Your Family “Out of Harm’s Way” at a Young Presidents’ Organization Family University, the wife of a bank president and mother of two told me that the evening after my program, her children came to her with questions and safety suggestions. Her children now understood the importance of smart safety practices.

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*“The Lady Was A Cop”*

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Nancy Hightshoe is an accomplished speaker, coach and consultant. She is an expert in:

- Professional and Personal Effectiveness
- Safety, Security and Survival.

#### **Nancy’s Background:**

- Business and Life Strategies Coach
- Police Officer, Detective and Entrepreneur



## A Few Suggestions:

Never scare your children. You're an adult and should be aware of the statistics.

For your children and for your own peace of mind, focus on the positive stories – like 10 year old Marissa Graham. Marissa was kidnapped in Oklahoma and escaped from the trunk of her assailant's car in Clovis, New Mexico on January 19, 2007.

In my seminar, I have pictures and tell the stories of some children who have escaped.

I keep reminding the children in the audience that they are brave and smart. In fact, the children receive a **Certificate of Knowledge and Bravery**.

Remind your children at home and school, too!

In my seminars, I ask participants, "What would you do?" and put them in different situations. Do the same with your family members. You may be surprised at the creative, smart responses your children will have.

**Quick Tip:** A child (or small adult) can be pulled in through a car window. Do not get too close.

## **THERE HAS BEEN SO MUCH MEDIA COVERAGE OF THESE CASES? WHAT SHOULD I SAY TO MY CHILD?**

Give them 100% of your attention. Ask open-ended, non-judgmental questions.

- What are your thoughts?

- Is there any part of the story that worries you?

Sometimes, as concerned adults, we give WAY too much information.

Focus on what your child is curious about or what frightens your child.

Use the conversation as an opportunity to discuss safety habits.

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- Has spoken throughout the United States and in 17 foreign countries

- On-camera expert for St. Louis NBC affiliate

- Represented a Fortune 100 corporation as their media spokesperson

- Master's Degree in Human Relations and in The Administration of Justice; Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

- Designed one of the first Personal Assault Investigative Units in the country

- Cleared 85% of her felony assault crimes cases (national average is 49%)

- Recognized POST-certified continuing education instructor (Police Officers Standards and Training)

- Named to the *World Who's Who of Women*

## Nancy's Commitment and Philosophy

My background in personal courage

- both as a police detective and entrepreneur

- is reflected in all my presentations.

## SHOULD I TALK WITH MY CHILD ABOUT WHAT TO DO IF KIDNAPPED?

Certainly. We teach executives and their families what to do. Let's talk with our children, too. Again, let's not scare them. Talk about it with the same calmness that you would discuss home insurance. You do not expect your house to catch fire, but you carry insurance, install smoke detectors, talk with your family about escape routes, etc.

The most important thoughts:

- We are your family and we will always love you – no matter what!
- We will always keep looking for you.
- No matter what has happened, it is not your fault.

You want your child to be able to tap into a Sense of Hope and Unconditional Love.

## THE "WE WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU" MAY BRING UP A SERIOUS SITUATION IN YOUR OWN FAMILY -

Individuals who prey on children, frequently threaten the child by telling him or her that, if the child tells their parents that they have been assaulted, their Mom and Dad will not love them any more.

- Stay calm.
- Ask open-ended, non-judgmental questions.
- Report the assaults to the police.
- Love your child a lot, seek therapy and incorporate as much normalcy into your lives as possible.

## WHY DIDN'T SHAWN RUN?

There has been excellent coverage of the Stockholm Syndrome. To distill it down to its finest elements:

- The victim has to rely on the assailant for every need from food, water and shelter to his very life.

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My philosophy of personal responsibility and purpose resonates throughout all of my programs.

Each seminar participant comes away with new skills and ideas on how to approach every challenge with creativity, resourcefulness and tenacity

- all qualities even more essential for success in today's world.

Future issues of *Life Skills* will include a wide range of topics from Nancy Hightshoe Seminars.

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- This fosters a bond and the victim feels grateful.
- Frequently a child is told that the assailant is in touch with the parents and that they do not want the child back.
- Or the assailant threatens to kill the child's family and/or pets.
- Eventually, when not rescued, the child suffers from the psychological condition of learned helplessness. The child adapts to the current situation.

The Stockholm Syndrome got its name from a 1973 bank robbery involving adults held hostage for 5 days. You can imagine how quickly a slight 11-year-old boy would succumb.

### **WAS SHAWN ALSO THE VICTIM OF MORE PERSONAL ASSAULTS?**

I was the detective in charge of more than 150 felony assault investigations which meant a lot of very detailed, personal interviews with victims and their loved ones. The advice I gave to families was that they did not need to hear all the details of the crime.

Think about it. If you were the parent of a child in that situation, having too much information would only torture you.

Over time, if he/she chooses to open up to discuss the incident in greater detail, that's fine. As a parent, you need enough information to put your mind at rest if this is possible. It is always a wise idea to have these discussions with the help of a therapist or counselor.

Again, put yourself in the place of the victim. What would you want?

### **WHAT DOES THE VICTIM NEED?**

What the victim needs most is to feel loved, accepted, safe. Replace some of the bad memories with good ones. In Ben's case, he wanted to play his video games. For someone else, it might be watching funny movies, eating home made chocolate chip cookies, snuggling in with favorite stuffed animals under a warm comforter, going to the zoo, spending quiet, reflective time in a park or their house of worship.

Follow their lead. Take care of them. Unlike the injuries of an auto accident, this pain is not easily seen. Take as much time as is needed to help him or her heal and get back on an even keel.

Be careful of asking "Why" questions. It's too easy for those questions to sound critical. (Why didn't you run away when your assailant wasn't home? And so on.)

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Keep reinforcing with the child:

- We are your family. We love you!
- You can tell us anything and we will still love you.
- You did nothing wrong. It was not your fault.

My experience is that almost every victim, from six years old to 80, wishes to have done something different which would have avoided the incident.

Some are logical: I should have locked my door. I should not have gone with that stranger to look at puppies. (Good lessons for the future, but still NOT the victim's fault!)

Some are illogical: I should have left 10 minutes earlier so I wouldn't have run into the assailant.

Let the child open up at whatever pace is comfortable. Definitely consider working with a therapist or counselor who has some background and experience with this type of incident.

### **DOES THE PUBLIC HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW IF THERE WERE PERSONAL ASSAULTS?**

You know the answer to that.

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Victims are not celebrities who crave having their every movement recorded in print and on TV!

## **HOW IMPORTANT IS THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE PUBLIC?**

Critical! In this case, Mitch Hultz, Ben's 15-year-old friend, gave an incredibly accurate description of the truck – which was the clue that broke the case.

One October years ago, long before the Amber Alert, there was a child kidnapping in Ohio. The sheriff asked for citizen involvement and scouts went door-to-door handing out flyers about the missing child. A little old lady called the sheriff the morning she got the flyer. She didn't want to be a bother, but she had noticed last night that her neighbor was in his garden, long after dark, digging. She thought that was odd given how chilly it was and the darkness. The sheriff got a search warrant and found the girl hidden under the house. Her assailant had been digging her grave.

Pay attention. You have good instincts.

## **SHOULD THE MEDIA BE SO INVOLVED?**

I have always thought so. Responsible journalists can be doggedly determined to uncover facts and bring them to our attention.

Sheriff Gary Toelke did everything right. Compare Sheriff Toelke's behavior to some of the half-truths we have all seen and heard.

He issued the Amber Alert and involved the media from the start. Mitch gave the truck description that broke the case, and the sheriff, working closely with the media, made sure that description went out **CONSTANTLY!**

Sheriff Toelke was straightforward and truthful. When he didn't know the answer, he said so.

He was unfailingly gracious. Watching him, you knew you could trust his word.

He shared as much information as he could. Once the boys were found, he explained to the media that he knew they were doing their job, but now he could not make any more statements because they were in the process of putting together the case. Perhaps because of the strong relationship the sheriff had developed, the media took that announcement as graciously as he had made it.

**SAFETY IS A MIXTURE OF FAMILY ADVENTURE,  
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & RESPONSIBLE MEDIA COVERAGE**  
We need all the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle to keep our children and ourselves safe.

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