

# **Yello Dyno Says, Beware of 'Tricky People'**

**By BETSY BETHEL**

The parental admonition "Don't talk to strangers" is now a dinosaur in the realm of child safety. Eighty-five percent of people who harm children are not strangers, according to missing children experts.

But another dinosaur - the cool and fun character Yello Dyno - has a more effective message for children who are confronted by any person who makes them feel afraid: "Take three steps back and run like the wind!"

Ohio Valley parents and educators are becoming acquainted with the Yello Dyno method of child safety, which teaches children as young as age 3 about personal safety without scaring them and by using catchy tunes they are more likely to remember in a crisis situation.

Orchard Park/The Children's Home of Wheeling received a \$2,500 grant to purchase two sets of Yello Dyno curricula and other Yello Dyno educational products, which it is loaning to Ohio County licensed day care and Head Start centers. The agency also is presenting workshops for adults throughout the Ohio Valley who are interested in learning about the program and about how to keep their children safe.

One such free workshop is taking place tonight at the Orchard Park Family Center, located at One Orchard Road. Orchard Park staff members will present "A Child Safety Program for Families: Raising Safe Kids in an Unsafe World" from 7-9 p.m. in honor of Child Abuse Prevention month. The program will include child abduction statistics, an interactive, multimedia introduction to the

Yello Dyno program, plus safety information for parents to take home and share with their children.

"We just totally believe in the Yello Dyno program," said Louise Patee, Orchard Park program coordinator. "This is important information that every child needs to know to protect himself."

To register for the free workshop, call Orchard Park, (304) 233-2367.

The Yello Dyno program was started in 1987 by Austin, Texas, residents Jan Wagner and her husband, Dennis, who experienced firsthand the terror of losing a child after their 2-1/2-year-old son wandered away from them at an amusement park. While the Wagners' story has a happy ending - their son was found five hours later enjoying himself in another area of the park - Jan Wagner decided to make it her goal in life to educate parents about how to protect their children and how to teach their children to protect themselves.

"Children as young as 3 can begin to know what to do in a situation," Wagner said in a phone interview on Monday, April 7. For example, if a child gets separated from her parents in a public place, she should know to find a checkout clerk, a police officer or a mother with children and tell them her parents are lost.

"But just telling them what to do doesn't work," Wagner said.

Through research, Wagner learned that children retain knowledge best when they learn it in songs. She also found that, when fear takes over in a crisis situation, no one can remember much of what they have been taught about how to respond, but their brains are still able to recall music lyrics.

"Music is the key to the Yello Dyno program," Wagner said. Featured in the curricula are CDs and videos with upbeat songs such as "My Body's Mine, Mine, Mine!", "If Your Parents Get Lost" and "Tricky People," featuring the chorus "Take three steps back and run like the wind," a statement that is repeated in several other songs.

In the videos, the Yello Dyno - a cool dude who struts around dressed in a brown bomber jacket and a gigantic pair of black sunglasses - along with a cast of children and adults stage dangerous situations and then sing fun songs embedded with simple lessons on how to respond.

The approach is fun and not scary, Wagner said, because trying to teach children through fear-based methods has not worked in the past. The emphasis is on building knowledge and self-confidence in children so they know how to stand up to any adult who causes them to feel unsafe.

"This is really a unique program. I've never seen anything like it," said Jeanne Hores, director of The King's Daughters Child Care Center in Wheeling, which currently is offering the Yello Dyno program to its 4- and 5-year-olds as part of the Orchard Park grant program.

"It is age-appropriate; it is retainable; and they don't use the word 'stranger' anymore. It helps kids relate better to a situation, and they really retain it. You hear them singing. They're really doing it. They want to talk about it, and they want to practice the songs," Hores said.

Recognizing unsafe situations is one of the most important lessons in the program, Wagner said.

"At the base of all safety is the need to be aware of deceptive people. We call them tricky people," she said. Through the song "Tricky People" and other songs and games, children learn that it doesn't matter if they know a person, that a person should not be trusted if his or her behavior makes them feel unsafe.