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Puppet Teaches Safety

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By Elizabeth Doran
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Child abduction may be a parent's worst nightmare, and children, staff and families in the Onondaga Central schools are learning how to make sure it doesn't happen in their community.

That's why more than 450 elementary children through grade five took part in child abduction prevention training at Rockwell and Wheeler schools Tuesday. The training continues today.

One of the children is first-grader Spencer Romano, who said he learned a lot during Tuesday's session.

"If a stranger comes up to me I learned I should take three steps back and then run like the wind," said Romano, 7. "I always stay with my mom and dad when we're at the grocery store or Wal-Mart,

and I'd be scared if someone tried to get me. Now I know what to do."

The training is conducted by Yello Dyno, a nationally recognized safety program in which children learn how to recognize and avoid dangerous situations with the aid of music, props and "Yello Dyno," a big yellow puppet.

The Onondaga school district recently secured a \$10,000 grant from the state Education Department to implement a program to prevent child abductions. It subcontracted the training to the Yello Dyno program, which is based in Austin, Texas. Other schools receiving such grants include Liverpool and Altmar-Parish-Williamstown.

"They don't try to scare kids," said Debbie Grimshaw, principal of Wheeler School and the district's director of special education. "They give kids the tools to protect themselves. And it's very appealing to kids because they like the catchy songs and the puppet. Safety is a big priority here, and we want our kids to be safe."

Judy vanderWerf, Yello Dyno education director, said the program empowers kids to be safe. "We teach them how to prevent getting into dangerous situations, and also how to get out of them," she said.

One in five children will be approached by a predator, and one in five girls and one in seven boys will be sexually molested by the time they're 18, she said.

First-grader Shane Moore, 7, said if he gets lost, he'll know what to do now. "I'll go find someone who works at the store and ask them to call my mom over the loudspeaker," he said.

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