

# INTRODUCTION

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by Gavin de Becker

**A**mong all the possible risks to our children, from the freak accident to the predictable accident, from the chemical under the sink to the chemical sold on the street corner, nothing is more frightening to us than the danger posed by people, the danger that is by design, the danger that is conscious.

The danger that is conscious may reside within the sixteen-year-old neighborhood boy who makes us uncomfortable, or the babysitter we do not trust, or our daughter's new boyfriend, or the mall security guard who stares at our daughter. Though many people act as if it's invisible, the danger that is conscious is usually in plain view, disguised perhaps, but in plain view nonetheless. Some of the behaviors that precede this kind of danger are designed to distract, confuse, or reassure us, but those behaviors are themselves signals. There is a universal code of violence, and like every parent, you already know that code.

Imagine you've just been blessed with a newborn baby girl. She is the latest model of human being, the proud result of ages of R & D that makes the most fantastic computer seem like an abacus. She has more brain cells than you and me combined, more in fact, than there are grains of sand on your favorite beach. She can learn, teach, design, build. She has within her the cleverness and dexterity to catch an ant or a whale. She can fly – literally. She can travel to another planet, and many of her contemporaries will.

Can you believe, even for a moment, that this astonishing being was designed without a defense system? Nature's

investment in this child is far too great for such an oversight. Parents are the defense system designed to spot danger at the earliest possible moment, and qualified to avoid it, evade it, escape it, or destroy it. By protecting our children, we accept life's clearest responsibility.

As the years go on, whose responsibility that is, becomes less clear. Does it still belong to the parents, or is it now the daycare center, or the parents of your child's friend, or the school, or the mall, or the police, or the university, or the government? And when do our children themselves take over? Is it the first time they are allowed to be alone in the house or the first time they walk to school on their own? Or is it that afternoon when they first back the car down the driveway (and over the sidewalk) into the street?

Of course, all parents worry about their children, even though one of the ironies of worry is that it can actually enhance risk. That's because as you worry about some imagined danger, you are distracted from what is actually happening. Perception and not worry is what serves safety. Perception focuses our attention; worry blurs it. And most ironically, the things we worry about are often chosen specifically because they are not likely.

Here's an example: It is easier for the worrier to wring his hands about the possible risk posed by an unknown molester who might wander into the neighborhood than to accept the intuition that someone who was invited into the house is sexually abusing a child. Before you banish that thought, understand that nearly 90 percent of sexual abuse is committed by someone the children know, not by strangers.

Sexual abuse is far from the only abuse children might suffer. We are also challenged to protect and empower them against abduction, date-rape, emotional abuse, bullying, and outright violence. Sexual abuse is merely the most denied, for hard as it is to accept the idea that some well-liked neighbor or friend of the family might be sexually abusing a child,

imagine the idea that it's someone in your own family. The denier doesn't have to consider this because it's so easy to replace that unwelcome thought with a warmer one like, "Not in this family." Yet, one in three girls and one in six boys will have sexual contact with an adult, so somebody must be responsible.

You can be certain that wherever abuse is happening, a denier is sitting in a box seat watching the performance that precedes the crime, watching a predator snake his way into a position of advantage, watching an adult persuade a child to trust him. During the beginning of sexual abuse, deniers are unconscious co-conspirators. And after sexual abuse, deniers will volunteer for the job of designing theories to explain the onset of a child's sleep disturbances or eating problems or sudden fear of that same adult she liked so much just a week ago.

If a discussion requires exploration of some hard reality, the denier will first try to wriggle away: "Talking about those things, you just bring them on yourself." Some deniers will give in and seem to acknowledge risk: "You're so right," they might say, "sexual abuse is an enormous problem, particularly for young teens. Thank God mine aren't there yet."

No, sorry, says reality, one of the most common ages at which sexual abuse begins is three.

"Well, sure, if you have homosexuals around small children, there's a risk."

No, sorry, says reality, nearly 100 percent of sexual abuse is committed by heterosexual males.

"Yeah, but that kind of pervert isn't living in our neighborhood."

Sorry, says reality, but that kind of pervert is living in your neighborhood. The U.S. Department of Justice has estimated that on average, there is one child molester per square mile.

"Well, at least the police know who these people are."

Not likely, says reality, since the average child molester victimizes between thirty and sixty children before he is ever arrested. (And anyway, when he is arrested, there's always a denier vouching for him with the familiar mantras: "But he's like such a nice man," or "You can't believe everything a child says.")

When all the defenses against reality are taken away, the denier switches to resignation (literally resigning from responsibility): "Well, there's nothing you can do about it anyway." Jan Wagner doesn't agree that there's nothing to be done about it. Her visionary work with developing and teaching The Yello Dyno Method™ takes issue when deniers sing the ever-popular hit-single: "How Could I Have Known?"

Deniers, more than any other people, have it in their hands to protect our children and change our nation. Why? Because the solution to sexual abuse and other victimization in America is not more laws, more guns, more police, or more prisons. The solution to child victimization is acceptance of reality.

If you are still reading by this point, and if you are giving children the gift of Yello Dyno, you are not a denier. Your acceptance of reality is, all by itself, the greatest asset you bring to protecting children.

Yello Dyno encourages and even enhances Nature's stunning protective resource: Intuition.

Intuition is knowing without knowing why, knowing even when you can't see the evidence. Denial is choosing not to know something even when the evidence is obvious. It's easy to see which of these two human abilities is more likely to protect children from violence.

If you do not accept that you are a creature of nature, fully endowed with powerful defenses, how can you nurture the defenses in your child? If you cannot make a safe place for

yourself in the world, can you make one for your child? If you cannot conquer your own unwarranted fears, can you soothe those of your child?

The Yello Dyno Method helps answer these questions. As important, since Yello Dyno is entertaining, I've found that children remember the vital lessons, and that is not the case with many of the traditional approaches to teaching about safety.

Children, who could be our best source of information about abuse and abusers, are rarely empowered to spot inappropriate behavior, to tell, or to resist.

Yello Dyno has changed that for millions of children, and hopefully will for millions more.

There comes a day when the people initially responsible for a child's safety welcome a new member to the team: the child. Parents may agonize over whether he or she is ready; they may even delay the day, but the day will come. Though it's at the end of a gradual process, your son or daughter will make that walk to school, or to a friend's house, or to the market. The eyes that used to casually take in the sights will have to detect, assess, perhaps even deter danger.

To be fully capable on their own, your children will eventually need lots of information, and they can learn much it from Yello Dyno – without being frightened or bored.

Only parents know what their children are ready to learn and how to best inform them. I can offer a test of what children would ideally know before they are ever alone in public. (I am noting just those points relevant to violence and sexual predation, and I am leaving out obvious requirements such as knowing one's home address, important phone numbers, and other basics.)

## THE TEST OF TWELVE

TO BE AS SAFE AS POSSIBLE YOUR  
CHILDREN WILL NEED TO KNOW...

1. How to honor their feelings – if someone makes them uncomfortable, that’s an important signal;
2. That you (the parents) are strong enough to hear about any experience they’ve had, no matter how unpleasant;
3. It’s Okay to rebuff and defy adults;
4. It’s Okay to be assertive;
5. How to ask for assistance or help;
6. How to choose who to ask;
7. How to describe their peril;
8. It’s Okay to strike, even to injure, someone if they believe they are in danger, and that you’ll support any action they take as a result of feeling uncomfortable or afraid;
9. It’s Okay to make noise, to scream, to yell, to run;
10. If someone ever tries to force them to go somewhere, what they scream should include, “This is not my father” (because onlookers seeing a child scream or even struggle are likely to assume the adult is a parent);
11. If someone says “Don’t yell,” the thing to do is yell (and the corollary: If someone says “Don’t tell,” the thing to do is tell);
12. To fully resist ever going anywhere out of public view with someone they don’t know, and particularly to resist going anywhere with someone who tries to persuade them.

Plenty of adults couldn’t themselves pass the Test of Twelve. For example, many people have never even considered that if a predator says “Don’t yell,” he is actually saying that yelling would serve you and silence would serve him. Too many people feel compelled to cooperate in their own victimization, in part because they assume they’ll be hurt if they don’t. When an intimidating criminal gives us an order,

our intellect begins to analyze based on incorrect assumptions: 'If I do as I'm told, he won't hurt me.'

On TV shows, when the tough guy says, "Keep your mouth shut and come with me," actors do just that. But in real life, when a predator says, "Don't yell," he is telling you what cards you hold, literally informing you of the way to mess up his plans. "Don't yell" should be heard by a child as "YELL." (It's probably obvious what a fun role-playing game can be used to teach this skill. It's called Don't yell/yell!)

The corollary guideline is if someone says, "Don't tell," your child should hear "TELL."

Item number 12 can take the most courage to apply. To resist fully is not easy, but if a predator orders you to go somewhere with him, he is really telling you that staying here is to your advantage and to his disadvantage. He wants to take you to a place where he'll be able to do whatever it is he can't do here. Since people often cooperate out of fear of being injured, it is essential for children to learn that initial injury is far from the worst consequence of a violent crime.

It's true that in some armed robberies, safety can be best served by simply giving over what the robber demands, but I'm not discussing robberies here. My observations focus on crimes where the predator must take his victim somewhere.

In America, we protect children brilliantly when they are very young (we have one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world) and then less well each year as they grow. Indeed, it takes a village to protect a child, but that's tough to accomplish when the village itself is not a safe place. While journalists are half a world away covering some buildup of troops, an unreported civil war is being waged against too many of our children right here. We have drive-by shootings instead of snipers, and drug addiction instead of starvation and disease, sexual abuse instead of torture, but it's war nonetheless, with all the predictable fear, suffering, and

bitterness. Quite unlike almost every other conflict in the world, however, this one is not being negotiated. America has surrendered. Big as we are, we just take the casualties as if we can afford them.

There are plenty of things we could do instead, and the book you are reading is among them. Though it's clear we cannot prevent all child abuse, what we can always do is take the best steps toward protecting our own children. You and your children then become models that teach others. Since some of the children now being mistreated will grow up angry and violent, and our kids will live in the same society with them, we cannot afford to do less.

In the most literal sense, anyone abusing any child might as well be abusing ours. Bless you, Jan for offering one of the best resources to help kids who need never become victims at all.



Gavin De Becker