

Violence Prevention by Getting Help

Prevent, Avoid, De-Escalate Potentially Violent Situations by Taking Charge, Getting Help

Kidpower is an educational charitable organization that, since 1989, has brought "People Safety" education to over 1.2 million children, teenagers, and adults, including those with special needs, from many different cultures - close to home and around the world. For publications; free articles, podcasts and e-newsletter; and information about our services and locations, please visit www.kidpower.org.

Copyright © 2009 Irene van der Zande. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to print this PDF and copy this article for personal or free charitable use only as long as the Kidpower information and this copyright notice are clearly visible. For example, this means you can use this article as an educator in your classroom. However, prior written permission is required to reproduce this article in any other printed or digital form for any other purpose including on websites, in newsletters, or as part of a paid publication or service. Please contact safety@kidpower.org.

Violence prevention skills include knowing how to ask for help. This is easy to say, but the fact is, asking for help can be hard. As I was driving home one night a few years ago, a man in another car pulled up in the lane next to me, making explicit sexual motions with his tongue and hands and threatening slicing gestures across his throat. I slowed down so that the man went through the stoplight ahead of me, but he waited and started bothering me again. I was tired. I just wanted to go home. I really did not want to deal with him.

Ironically, earlier that evening, I had been teaching a self defense and violence prevention workshop, and one of my students had complained that he hated asking for help because it made him feel helpless. I told him that, as a society, we needed to learn to see getting help from others as a form of taking charge of a situation rather than a sign of weakness. I had all of our students practice interrupting a busy person to get help.

Remembering this, I sighed in annoyance. I signaled to my friend and fellow instructor who was driving in the car behind me to please pull over with me to the side of the road. I had so much resistance that I waited until just before we got onto the freeway where my friend and I would have headed in different directions. Of course, as soon as the man bothering me saw that I was with someone else, he disappeared.

When we need help, we must sound and look like we really mean it. Whether the problem is an accident or an assault, people often freeze when the unexpected happens. Shouting for help aimlessly is not nearly as effective as giving clear information and direct orders in a strong, loud voice, "I AM BEING ATTACKED! CALL THE POLICE!" If someone is watching, point to that person and give directions, "YOU IN THE BLUE SHIRT, GET OVER HERE AND HELP ME...NOW!"

In order to support the development of violence prevention skills among the young people in our lives, we can teach our children to make safety plans for how to get help when they need to. One teenaged girl was followed by a man who saw her in a parking lot on her way home from school. Terrified, she went from store to store in a crowded shopping center, looking for someone who didn't seem too busy. Finally, she managed to lose the man and ran home. A safer plan would have been for this girl to have practiced skills

so that she would have known how to interrupt a busy adult, to be both persistent and respectful in insisting on getting help, and to wait for help to arrive before leaving the store.

Violence prevention is not the only area in our lives where getting help makes a difference. Whether we are dealing with a personal safety issue or facing any other challenge, knowing how to ask for help from others is a fundamental life skill. Even though it may feel that way sometimes, it is important to remember that we are not alone. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. We do not need to face problems by ourselves. By turning to each other for help, we can bring more protection, comfort, information, resources, and understanding into all of our lives.