

How to Give Your Students the Skills to Prevent Crime

S

omeone has just stolen a student's clothing from the clothes dryer for the third time this month. Custodians are cleaning obscenities from the library doors. A student's lunch money and some pencils are missing from her desk. Someone has smashed the emergency exit signs on the cafeteria doors. Too often in Adventist schools, these incidents are misdiagnosed as discipline problems rather than crime problems.

Teaching crime prevention can make a big impact on our schools. Most crimes are crimes of opportunity. When you remove the opportunity, you can reduce or eliminate the likelihood that many types of crimes will occur.

Too often, when authorities say their schools don't have a crime problem, they are simply ignoring or covering up incidents that have occurred. Since the crimes go unreported to law enforcement, they are therefore unsolved. Students don't learn how to protect themselves and so become easy marks for victimization.

Several years ago, when I became the new security director for Pacific Union College, one of the biggest complaints I heard was that it took two to three hours to get local law enforcement to arrive at our rural campus. Out of curiosity, I asked the local sheriff's department about PUC's crime rate. The college had had virtually no crime reported for the year. Since the squeaky wheel gets the grease, it was no wonder that it took hours for response to non-emergency calls. County staffing was being concentrated in areas that regularly report crime, and Angwin was not one of them. It was not until we began aggressively tracking and reporting all crimes to law enforcement that we got quicker service and more attention to our problems. When we made this information available to students, we suddenly saw greater interest in our regularly scheduled crime-prevention presentations. Use of the evening escort service soared, and people expressed interest in our property-identification program.

When students come to school assuming that it is a crime-free area, they may fail to take measures to protect themselves or their property because they don't see the need. If students are subsequently victim-

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ized, and no measures are taken to call attention to the problem, others continue in their haphazard approach to crime prevention and remain an easy mark for victimizers.

Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act

On April 5, 1986, Jeanne Clery was murdered in the freshman dormitory at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. Her family subsequently began a nationwide campaign to force universities to reveal how much crime has occurred on their campuses. The family felt Jeanne was security conscious, but because she was unaware of the crime rate on her campus, she did not know what security measures to take. The Clerys' lobbying efforts paid off when the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act was signed into law in November 1990 (Public Law 101-542).¹ The law requires that American institutions of higher education collect information regarding crime rates and make it available to current and prospective students and employees.

Although tracking and reporting of crime on U.S. college campuses is now required, there is no such provision for K-12 schools. However, if we make students at all levels aware of crime risks and actively teach prevention methods, this will greatly reduce the likelihood of their being victimized.

Crime-prevention programs should begin in kindergarten. Law-enforcement agencies can provide assistance with such programs. PC, the talking police car (a robot police vehicle) and McGruff the Crime Dog are just two mediums employed by law-enforcement agencies to tell kids about crime. A visit from the local police or sheriff's department and a tour of a police vehicle can open channels for discussion about safety. This may also be a good time to talk about destruction of property. With so much vandalism occurring in our communities, many children don't understand that this is a crime and that it ultimately hurts everyone.

Crime-prevention programs should also include information about personal safety. When giving safety presentations to primary-grade students, I always ask if they have ever been left home all alone. The number of hands that go up

surprises even the teachers. Our schools have many young latch-key students who come home to an empty house every day after school.

Children need to learn how to behave when they are in danger. They are taught to obey adults, but they need to understand that there are times when this is not appropriate, that they shouldn't obey or be polite to strangers or adults who want them to do something that doesn't seem right to them. Many children have been abused or victimized because they did what an adult told them to do.

As children grow and become responsible for their own safety, schools should expand their crime-prevention programs. In Operation Identification, for example, engravers are loaned to students, who mark their property with a

number such as their driver's license or other ID. Record sheets are also given to the students so they can keep track of the property and the number applied.

What Else Can You Do?

Listed below is other valuable information for students, which can be put into brochures or handouts, presented in assemblies, or discussed during classroom time.

Stranger Safety for Smaller Children

Strangers are usually portrayed to children on TV as sinister men in dark clothing. This misconception can be dangerous. Children may thus conclude that all strangers are bad.

Children need to learn the difference between bad strangers and good ones.

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McGruff the Crime Dog teaches children how to be safe.

Good strangers are people like the police, mail carriers, firefighters, or the clerk in a store. Tell them that good strangers will not ask you to follow them or go with them without your parent. If someone tries to get you to go with them and your parent is not close by, raise your voice and say, "Get away! I don't know you." That way, people who can help you will not think that this person is one of your parents.

Tell them that if someone acts in a way that doesn't seem right to you, or if the person actually tries to grab you or get you to go with him or her, it's OK to do things that draw attention to yourself and your situation. If you're in a store, start grabbing things off the shelf and throwing them. If you're outside, run to a nearby house and pound on the door or run inside. Scream for help.

Children also need to learn about "good touch—bad touch," including the fact that it is not always a stranger who is the source of danger—it may be a step-parent, uncle, neighbor, or other familiar person. Tell the child if anyone suggests doing things that make you uncomfortable, you should report this to a trusted adult. By handling the subject sensitively, it is possible to make children aware of danger without unduly frightening them.

In Case of Abduction

If you have been abducted by a stranger, this is another time not to worry about being polite. If a stranger forces you into a car, try to step on the gas pedal at a stop sign, which will cause an accident. Attempt to get out of the car when it's moving slowly. If you can't get out the front passenger door, jump into the back seat and try there. Jump up and down in the seat and wave your arms to call attention to yourself.

If the abductor puts you in the trunk of the car, pull out the wires that turn on the brake light. Police officers may stop a car with no brake lights. Yell and bang on the trunk lid. You can also use your foot to kick out the tail light lens. Stick your hand or foot out the opening to call attention to yourself.

Home Safety

Never open the door for a stranger. If you're home alone and a stranger comes

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to the door, call out that your parents can't come to the door right now. If the person wants to give you something, such as an advertisement or package, suggest leaving it on the step.

Even if your parents are at home, it's still not a good idea to let strangers in. Tell your parents that someone is at the door, and let them decide who should or should not come in.

If you answer the telephone, never give out information about yourself or your family. If you are home alone and someone asks for one of your parents, tell the caller that he or she can't come to the phone right now and offer to take a message. If a caller keeps bothering you, go to a neighbor or call a relative for help.

Call 911 in an emergency when someone needs help fast, such as a fire, medical problem, or crime.

Personal Safety for Older Students

Being safety conscious when you're out in public means being prepared and alert to the dangers around you. The way you carry yourself when walking can predict whether you become a victim of street crime.

1. Always walk confidently, keeping your destination in mind. Victimizers look for weak, frightened people. Do not become so over-burdened with packages or tuned out listening to music on a headset that you are unaware of your surroundings.

2. Whenever possible, walk with a friend. It's much more fun, and it's less likely that you'll be targeted by would-be criminals.

3. Stay in well-lighted, well-traveled areas. Avoid shortcuts, alleys, and bushes. If you're on a sidewalk, stay close to the curb, and away from doorways and alleys where someone could hide.

4. Make eye contact with people when walking. However, do not respond to conversation from strangers on the street—continue walking.

5. If you carry a purse or wallet, transfer money and credit cards to your pocket. If challenged on the street, give up your purse or wallet. This will be easier to endure if you're not losing all your valuables. A man may want to carry two wallets; one with a couple of dollars to give a robber, the other with valuables. For women, grip your purse or bag firmly, keeping it on the side away from the street. If you are mugged, remember that nothing you own is worth losing your life—give the robbers what they ask for.

Security in Residence Halls

1. Never prop open exterior doors. This exposes the entire dorm to a safety hazard. If you find a door propped, close it.

2. Keep your doors and windows locked at all times. It only takes a few seconds for someone to enter your room and steal your property. Don't bring things to school that are too valuable to lose.

3. Engrave valuable property with your driver's license or other personal ID number. Put this number on two places on the item, one in a conspicuous area, the other in a not-so-conspicuous area. Keep an inventory sheet of your engraved property and the number applied. If some of your property is too small or too valuable to engrave, photograph it and keep the pictures with your inventory sheet in a safe place. Clothing should be marked with a laundry pen to prevent theft or arguments over ownership.

4. Have your parents check their homeowner's policy to see if it covers property in your dorm room. If not, coverage can be increased or purchased to

cover such items.

5. Report all acts of theft and vandalism in your dorm. If others are aware of crime risks, they will be more likely to take security measures to protect themselves from becoming a victim.

Safe Dating Tips for Women

1. If you're dating a new person, meet only in public places and don't be alone with him until you know him well. Just because the person attends your school doesn't always mean you know everything about him.

2. Always let a friend or a roommate know where you're going and what time you expect to be back.

3. Don't date a man whose behavior is domineering or antisocial.

4. Trust your instincts when a dating situation doesn't feel right. Be wary of behaviors that make you feel uncomfortable. Speak up firmly if someone is pressuring you.

5. Choose dating activities carefully. Don't leave it up to the man to make all the decisions. Be self-confident and assertive. If a date seems to be getting out of control, terminate it.

6. Select your friends and associates

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with care. Before you go out with a group, think about potential problems, such as transportation.

7. Don't attend parties that involve alcohol or drugs. A new illegal drug, Rohypnol, known as the date-rape drug, has become a source of concern. This addictive sedative, which causes blackouts and amnesia, can be slipped into a woman's drink by a would-be assailant. Women who have ingested the drug may wake up later realizing they have been assaulted, or become conscious during the rape and realize they cannot move.

8. Always carry money for telephone calls and a taxi ride home.

Note: Men can be victims of rape and have the same right to counseling and legal action as women do.

Preventing Bicycle Theft

A bicycle represents a way of life you can't afford to lose in today's expensive and energy-conscious world. Yet each year, many bicycles are lost to thieves. A major factor in bicycle theft is the way bicycles are locked. Many thefts can be prevented if the owner knows how to properly secure a bicycle.

Choosing a Lock

1. Even the most ingenious locking device is still only a deterrent. Resistance to cutting or forcing is directly proportional to the thickness of the padlock shackle, cable, or chain.

2. A good padlock should have at least a 7/16-inch hardened alloy steel shackle. Buy one made of hardened steel. A padlock with a larger shackle provides greater security.

3. The shackle of the lock should be secured at both "heel and toe." If the double-locking system is used, you should find an indentation on each shackle leg.

4. Make sure that the padlock locking mechanism uses pin-tumbler construction.

5. Consider using a "U" shaped lock especially designed for securing bicycles.

Choosing a Cable or Chain

A cable or chain will enable you to secure the bike frame as well as both wheels simultaneously and to anchor your bike to a wide range of immovable objects.

1. Choose a cable or chain at least six feet long so you can secure the frame and front wheel to a fixed object.

2. When choosing a cable or chain, remember: the heavier, the better. If you use a chain, steel links of hardened alloy steel at least 3/8-inch thick take longer to defeat by cutting or prying. Buy a chain that is not hardened all the way through. A non-hardened inner core makes breaking the chain with a hammer or cutting it with bolt cutters more difficult.

Finally, even the best lock and chain can be easily defeated if you don't lock your bike to an immovable object. Choose a tree of substantial size, a bike rack, light pole, or any other object that doesn't allow thieves to merely lift the chain or cable over the fixed object.

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Children learn about crime prevention from PC, the talking police car.

Car Safety

1. Always lock your car doors after getting into your vehicle or when you leave it. Park only in well-lighted, well-traveled areas, even if this means you have to walk farther.
2. Keep your keys in your hand as you approach your car so you won't have to grope for them when you get to the door.
3. Check the backseat before getting into your car.
4. If you think you are being followed, drive to an open business such as a gas station. Never drive to your destination.
5. Keep your car well maintained, and never let your gas tank get below half full. If your car does break down, open the hood and get back inside, keeping your doors locked. If someone stops to help, ask the person to call a tow truck, your auto club, or the police, but stay inside the locked car.
6. Don't stop to help other stranded motorists. Make a phone call to summon help for them.

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Conclusion

The above information is only a sample of ideas for safety that can be included in a comprehensive education program. Many planning resources are available to help you. Some of these are listed below. Your local law enforcement is also a valuable resource in crime pre-

vention planning, as well as in identifying and solving of local crime problems. ☞

"McGruff" Crime Prevention Campaign
National Crime Prevention Council
Crime Prevention Coalition
805 15th Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

National Crime Prevention Institute (NCPI)
School of Justice Administration
University of Louisville
Shelby Campus
Louisville, KY 40292

Crime Prevention Center,
Office of the Attorney General
1515 "K" Street, Suite 383
Sacramento, CA 94814

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REFERENCE

1. *Federal Register*, U.S. Department of Education, April 29, 1994.

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