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## TAKE program offers proactive step toward safety

By: Carrie Alexander

Although child abductions have been on a steady decline since 1996, in 2005 there were more than 9,000 new cases of child abduction in the state, according to the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

But parents and kids alike can be proactive and help prevent future child abductions.

Learning to fight back is another alternative.

The Ali Kemp Educational Foundation offers a free self-defense training program that provides young girls and women with the skills needed to keep themselves safe. The TAKE program also educates women about awareness.

It is a service dedicated to keeping women in the Kansas City area protected. It was created in honor of Ali Kemp, who was murdered in June 2002 at a Leawood, Kan., swimming pool.

Carina Miller, the recreation manager for Kansas City's parks and recreation department, said that although the program was just for women, it benefited the community as a whole.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for women to learn how to be protected," Miller said. "I find that mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and children are all taking these classes as families."

Girls are only slightly more at risk to be abducted than boys, however. The Statistical Analysis Center of the state patrol said that girls were only 7.4 percent more likely to be kidnapped than boys.

More than 92 percent of children abducted are between the ages of 12 and 16. Children ages birth to 4 years account for only 2.8 percent of kidnappings.

Communication can help parents keep their children out of harm's way.

Verlee Gilkerson, a mother and grandmother, said parent responsibility had a lot to do with the protection of children. She said she thought it was the job of parents to think for their children because many of their decision-making skills had not fully matured.

"I kept an eye on them," Gilkerson said. "I talked with them and made them aware of what could happen. I knew where they were at."

A recent Newsweek article said there was no definite profile of a predator or a victim, but 67 percent of missing children were last seen at their homes, and 30 percent were abducted between 2 and 6 p.m.

Assistant Kearney Police Chief Barney Hatfield said being observant was one of the best ways to keep kids safe.

“If a car or person looks suspicious, call the police.” Hatfield said. “We’ll come and check it out.”

Hatfield said he could not recall any abductions in Kearney.

The U.S. Department of Justice offers tips for keeping children safe.

- Parents should use a secret code word that tells children it’s OK to go with a person.
- Children should stay away from strangers.
- Children should not help strangers who are lost or missing something.
- If separated from their parents, children should not try to find them.
- Children should always ask permission and tell a parent where and what they are doing.
- Children should run if someone is following them.

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