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Community Center hosts timely class on children's self-defense

by Patty McCormac

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Lorenzo Patino, 10, learns how to break the grasp if caught in the clutches of a stranger from instructor Jennifer Johnson.

Chelsea King of Poway.

The old idea of "things like that just don't happen here," is clearly out the window, so children of all ages need to know at least the basics.

Johnson said teaching younger children about this subject must be done in general terms so that they are not frightened.

"I just give them information, then answer their questions or let them tell about their experiences in the past and clear up any misconceptions," she said.

To make the hour-long class more interesting for the youngsters, she asked them to participate by calling for volunteers to come up and help her demonstrate and rewarding them with candy.

Gabriella Patino, 10, helped demonstrate how to stay out of reach of a stranger. Later her brother Lorenzo, also 10, learned how to defend himself if he did get caught in the grasp of a predator. Lorenzo also takes karate, and knew most of the moves already.

Johnson told her students to rely on their feelings in a questionable situation.

"Follow your instincts, anytime you feel uncomfortable, follow them," she said. And she wants them to go a step further.

"If you feel uncomfortable, tell an adult you trust right away," she said.

Because about three quarters of the children have cell phones, she said they could call 911 if they felt it necessary when they were away from a trusted adult.

"When you are not with your parents, who is responsible for your safety?" Johnson asked the students.

"I am," the class said in unison.

The children learned how to respond when the doorbell rings while they are home alone or how to answer the telephone so the person on the other end does not know an adult is not home.

They learned that adults should not ask children for help in finding puppies or helping them was any other task which might put them in a precarious position.

"It is not your job to help adults," Johnson stressed. "Adults help other adults."

Mother Sarah Flatley stayed to watch the class and was pleased with it.

"I think kids haven't heard the information in such detail," she said.

Johnson, 31, who was a police officer in both Sacramento and Carlsbad, teaches self-defense for all ages through her company HEAT, an acronym for health, empowerment, awareness and tactical defense.

Johnson's motto is a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: "You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face."

To learn more about self-defense classes, call Johnson at (858) 254-9935 or visit www.heatselfdefense.com.

RANCHO SANTA FE — On the afternoon of April 16, 22 children gathered in the Rancho Santa Fe Community Center to learn a little about stranger danger and self-defense. The children ages 8 to 11, listened to their instructor Jennifer Johnson, a former police officer, who taught them how to recognize the dangers of being approached by someone they don't know.

The class is timely in light of the recent events of a stranger trying to lure local children into his pickup truck. Making the class even more urgent was that it was on the same day John Gardner confessed he had also murdered Escondido teen Amber Dubois about a year before he killed

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