

Plattekill Elementary students learn how to avoid abduction

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Dominick Magistro, center, of Carlie's Crusade Foundation, leads students during a self-defense tactics demonstration at Plattekill Elementary School on Thursday, Jan. 31. Carlie's Crusade Foundation offers child abduction prevention workshops for children and parents.

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By Paul Brooks

Times Herald-Record

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PLATTEKILL — Four years ago today, an 11-year-old girl named Carlie Brucia walked across the parking lot of a car wash in Florida and straight into hell.

"Carlie did nothing wrong. What happened to her was not her fault," said Dominick Magistro, his voice echoing off the cold, hard walls of the gym at the Plattekill Elementary School. He paced back and forth in the middle of big circle of fifth-graders who stared at him, wondering what was next.

"Our goal is to teach you how to get away. ... We want to teach you not to be a victim."

Yesterday's program was put on through a local nonprofit group named Carlie's Crusade Foundation. Now in its fourth year, the group has delivered its anti-abduction message to nearly 20,000 youngsters and 5,000 adults, including parents and teachers, in the mid-Hudson, according to Mike Mazzariello, a lawyer and member of the group.

The message was simple: Stay in groups. Walk with your head up. Be confident. "Human predators are just like animals " . If you don't look weak, they will look for someone else."

But if that fails, then what?



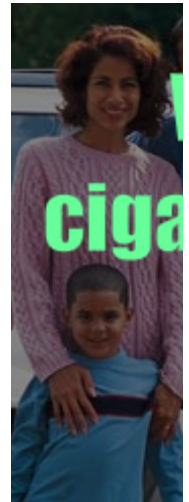
"Hands up. Yell — 'Get away. Get away. Get away. Fire! Help!'," Magistro said. They stand and try it. The voices quaver, little and weak.

"Louder," he said. "Make them hear you in the office."

Mouths gape wide, faces turn red, and the voices leap.

Magistro hauls out a life-sized dummy and portable punching pads. One by one each child attacked imaginary abductors.

Slap them in the face, Magistro and his assistants said. Do it hard and quick. One, two, three, and run.

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Kick them in the shin. It hurts. "Oh, God," a slim, shy girl said. Her first kick was tentative. "Again," Magistro said.

More than 1,000 students at the school will go through the hour-long drill. They see Carlie's abduction video and learn about Internet safety, too, said Bob Clydesdale, who teaches the latter.

"Kids need to have this experience in 2008," Principal Lou Pietrogallo said.

"It was helpful," said fifth-grader Ariel Haber after the session ended.

"In a dangerous situation, I would definitely use it."

pbrooks@th-record.com

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