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Children's Self Defense

■ THE NEXT GENERATION

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■ DEADLY & DYNAMIC

Dual Strikes

CHAMPS OF THE MARTIAL ART CINEMA



facts and fallacies about **Children's Self Defense**

by Jane Hallander • photos by Jane Hallander

At age six
Joey
weighed
about 60
pounds. His
assailant weighed 180
pounds. The man
walked up to Joey with
kind words and a big
candy bar. The next
thing Joey knew, he
was grabbed violently
and dragged into the
stranger's car, never
to be seen again. Joey
didn't have a chance
or did he?

Joey isn't a real person. However, there are children across the United States who are abducted violently in the same manner as our imaginary Joey.

Maybe Joey, or those real children, could have defended themselves, not with the same techniques that one adult uses against another, but with a few simple principles and techniques that even a six year old can comprehend.

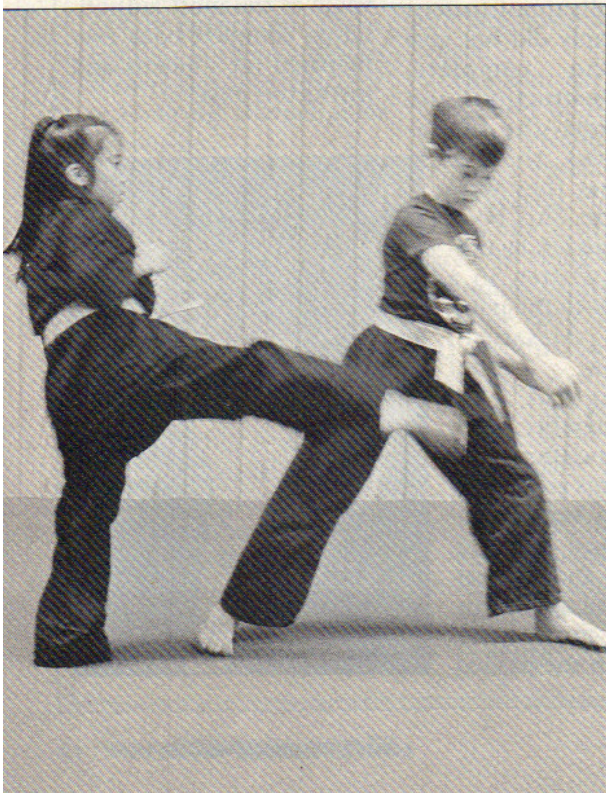
Self defense for a small child is not as simple as watching the movie, *Karate Kid*. Actual reality does not allow a small child to gain control over a far larger adult. Instead, they must rely on awareness and diversions which will give them the opportunity to escape.

However, even the simplest technique must still be taught to a child by adults who understand small children's thought and memory processes. Bill and Pati Grossman of South San Francisco, California are two experts at educating youngsters.

They hold regular pee-wee self defense classes at their kenpo karate school. Kenpo is ideally suited to children's self defense. Strictly a defensive martial art, it is easily adapted to and doesn't take as long to perfect as do other martial styles.

Kenpo is designed around a hard and soft principle of self defense that uses many circular open hand and close range fist techniques that don't require sheer strength for effectiveness. Often kenpo

This little girl is practicing basic punches and blocks in a simulated attacking situation.



stylists use their opponent's force against the opponent by stepping back and letting the attacker walk into a waiting punch.

Since the emphasis in kenpo is on hand techniques, it's a good self defense system for children, who use their hands easier than their feet. However, the Grossmans do teach their pee-wee students a few simple kicks. Most kenpo kicks are directed to the knee or groin, targets that are accessible to small defenders.

Bill Grossman has been involved in martial arts for over 15 years. He has been teaching for the past 8 years. He trained under and received his kenpo black belt from Rick Alemany, a well known West Coast kenpo karate instructor. Grossman himself has always enjoyed working with children, both for self defense and for tournament competitions. He promotes several tournaments each year in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as coaching his own young competitors.

Pati Grossman also received her black belt from Alemany. As a brown belt competitor in 1983, she was a frequent winner in both forms and fighting on the Northern California tournament circuit.

Both Bill and Pati Grossman maintain that it's a mistake to consider a six or seven year old child physically and mentally able to unleash a combination of self defense tactics that will disable an attacking adult. Instead, Grossman leads his young students down another avenue of self defense training. For instance, an example of the kind of physical training Grossman's students receive is—if grabbed from the front, the youngsters know how to kick their assailant in the shin or groin with a simple front kick. This gives them enough time to escape and run for help.

Mentally, the children learn to stay away from strangers. Then, if they have escaped or eluded someone, they know to seek help from stores or crowds of people.

The Grossman's stress that after one year of kenpo training, young children should be able to defend themselves against another child their own size and age to a year or two older. Only junior students, in the 12 to 13 year old range, after three to four years of training are able to defend themselves against an untrained adult.

So now that we know that small children with or without karate training cannot do much to physically save themselves

what can they do?

"Small children cannot overpower an adult." States Bill Grossman. "However, they can create a time gap, giving them an opportunity to escape."

Various diversionary techniques can be successfully used by children. They can also be taught, without too much trouble, to react instantly with such a technique whenever the need arises.

For instance, when a child is grabbed and held up off the ground, he or she can poke to the attacker's eyes or punch them in the nose. A simple strike like those can make a assailant release their grip long enough for the child to get away. Sometimes a quick reaction like that will even completely stop the attack.

If the assailant is much taller, as are most adults, and the child is on the ground, Grossman teaches them that a quick kick to the attacker's shin, knee or groin can slow them down enough to let the child get away.

"A small child's best defenses are to bit, kick, poke, punch, scream, and run. Their self defense instructor's job is to teach them how and when to use their mental awareness and basic physical techniques." Says Grossman.

Children are less apt to panic than adults in dangerous situations. Since they don't fall prey to fear as much, they can react quicker and more positively than adults. While they may not be able to put together a series of powerful fighting techniques, they are able, in a calm, cool manner, to literally hit and run from their assailants.

How does one instill the reactions and knowledge that can save their lives in five year olds?

The pee-wee classes that Bill and Pati teach are structured to arts, while preparing them for practical self defense against adults or school yard bullies.

The first requirement of Grossmans' classes come from the parents. They must commit their children to at least six months of karate training. This is a must, since it will take six months for such a young child to learn basic punching and kicking and correct reactions to an attempted assault.

The pee-wee class starts each session with 15 minutes of stretching to build coordination, balance and added flexibility. After that, blocking, punching and kicking practice is done

blocks—inward, outward, upward and downward—are the only blocking techniques learned. Grossman likes to keep it simple with such young children, so emphasizes only those blocks and the most elementary offensive techniques.

The class operates on the principle of positive reinforcement. Little yelling or negative criticism is used. Instead, the Grossmans reward their small charges by giving them stripes on their belts as they make progress. As the children earn their stripes, they can see themselves progressing, giving themselves more interest and confidence. For instance, after they learn kenpo's first punching exercise—1 to 60 count punching—they get a yellow stripe. Another stripe is awarded after they master the four basic blocks. Their third stripe comes after they learn the first kata, consisting of eight self defense techniques.

Kenpo katas are also valuable training aids for young children. Each kata is a series of well thought out defense tactics. At first the kata is practiced in front of mirrors in a dance-like fashion. As the children become more familiar with the kata, they start reacting to imaginary opponents as they practice. Finally, other students are allowed to simulate attacks from different angles, bringing out the reality



Bill and Pati Grossman instructing some pee-wee students.

of the Kata's self defense applications.

For street self defense, the Grossmans teach their students, both old and young alike, useful techniques such as how to fall properly if pushed off balance. An example is, if pushed hard from behind, the children know how to execute a forward roll that brings them to their feet in a balanced fighting or running position.

An often asked question is, how do children handle martial arts expertise and knowledge?

basic kenpo sparring drills of blocking, kicking, punching and turning. Bill Grossman feels that any child younger than six years cannot control themselves mentally or physically enough to benefit from partner sparring practice.

He stresses to the children that they must first learn to protect themselves. They know to keep that knowledge to themselves and their families. They are told that if they brag at school or show off their martial training to friends, it might cause someone to try them out, causing possible injury and embarrassment.

Of course, occasional school yard fights do occur, usually with an older bully picking on the pee-wee student. In the past, some of Grossman's pee-wee students have successfully used their self defense training to prevent further bullying. They are taught that if a bully attacks, they can use their martial training as a last resort to protect themselves. However, they must stop their own attack as soon as the bully has been deterred.

The Grossmans enjoy creating a variety of hypothetical situations for their young charges. One of their favorites is a punch from behind and subsequent attack by two other children, one in front and one in back. The defending pee-wee students per-

form a forward roll, coming up on their feet using a combination left and right reverse punch to the stomach of the front attacker, and back kick to the one behind them.

While these four to seven year olds cannot successfully mimic the antics of a Karate Kid, they are able to absorb enough protective knowledge to prevent a possible tragedy that has plagued so many families in recent years. ♦