

Crothersville KVKids Event

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Education key to keeping kids safe

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CROTHERSVILLE — Education is the key in preventing child abductions.

That was the message organizers of a child safety program brought to an estimated 250 parents, grandparents, children and others Tuesday night at the Crothersville school gym.

KinderVision presented the do's and don'ts of basic child safety education. Program organizers conducted interviews with children, which were taped onto the end of a free take-home safety video. The program was dedicated to 10-year-old Katlyn "Katie" Collman.

"They'll want to watch it because they're in it," Douglas Sebastian said.

By asking basic information, such as their favorite color or sports team, and getting the children to talk about themselves makes them the star of the video, he said.

The program stressed educating children about safety concerns, something that is a collective responsibility, Sebastian said.

"It's all about education, education, education," he said. "These lessons empower them."

"We're all about keeping them safe, not using it (the video) to find them" said Nancy Sebastian.

After the Jan. 25 abduction of Collman, Nancy Sebastian said she received a call from town members who said children were having trouble sleeping.

Collman's body was discovered five days later north of Seymour in a creek that feeds into Cyprus Lake.

Nancy and Douglas Sebastian founded the Peru, Ind.-based organization, 15 years ago after the abduction and murder of a southern California girl. To date, KinderVision has been presented in 47 states and to 10 million people, the Sebastians said.

"If you've given them the tools to recognize behaviors that aren't right, they're better off," Douglas Sebastian said.

Crothersville Police Officer Vurlin MacIntosh said he hopes parents walk away from the program "with a better observation on how to keep their kids safe."

The video serves two purposes, he said. One, parents have a video of their children and an instruction tool and, two, law enforcement have an aid in finding children if they are missing.

MacIntosh had worked on bringing a safety education program like KinderVision into the town for six or seven years, he said.

"Until something happens, people don't see a need for it," he said.

Parents came seeking knowledge for their children and themselves.

Father of three Rich Swartwood of Brownstown said he wanted his children to know “how to deal with stranger and how to be safe.”

Shelia and Ed Bennett, also of Brownstown, learned about the presentation from a flier their 6-year-old daughter, Makenzie, brought home from school.

“We’re hoping she’ll watch it and learn from it,” Shelia Bennett said.

The murder and abduction Collman may have influenced many parents to attend.

“That happens in small towns, too,” Shelia Bennett said.

The Bennetts are keeping a tighter rein on their daughter and said they probably wouldn’t have participated in the program if it weren’t for Collman’s murder.

The Sebastians hope the program provides a sense of security to the families and the communities of Jackson County.

“We hope this helps,” Douglas Sebastian said.

The Sebastians presented Crothersville Elementary School with a KinderVision school package, with videos available in English and Spanish, as well as material from the organization’s program for older children, Wolf Traps.