

# Family Series

## You Play a Role in Protecting Children

At some time or another, you've probably seen an angry parent taking out frustrations on a child in an abusive manner. If you're like most people, these actions can make you feel uncomfortable and unsure how and whether to respond.

The first thing to remember, contrary to the inhibitions you may have, is that you should intervene to protect the safety of the child. But how you go about doing so can make a huge difference in the reaction you may get and whether the outcome is successful.

### Put yourself in others' shoes

We've all had bad days when we may have said or done something that we wished we hadn't. Before approaching an adult or child, first think how you would want to be approached in a similar situation. Or think of that person as a friend and the situation as atypical, before you act. This may help you refrain from making any unnecessary judgments.

### Consider the following responses:

- Offer assistance to the adult. "I see you've got your hands full, can I help with anything?"
- Show empathy for the parent. "It can be really frustrating when children are little and want every toy they see."
- Share your own experiences. "I remember when I was young. I didn't understand toys cost money."
- Offer a suggestion. "My child finds it helpful to keep a wish list for things they can't buy. You might find that helpful, too."
- Comfort the child. "This is a nice toy. It must be hard for you to leave it here."

### Intervention can be difficult

As a society, we generally try to stay out of other people's business. You may wish to turn away from an abusive situation rather than to offer help. Remember, when choosing to ignore a situation,

you may be implying your approval or disregard for the care of the child.

Even if the person you choose to approach responds in a less than desirable way, it doesn't necessarily mean your message went unheard.

### Reporting Child Abuse

If you've offered help and the situation worsens or if the situation is too risky for you to be involved, immediately alert security if you're in a public place and also call **911**. If possible, write down the license plate number of the vehicle the person is in. Also be sure to contact Child Protective Services at **1.800.800.5556** or the National Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-4-A-CHILD** (1.800.422.4453) if you suspect a child is being harmed.

*Adapted from "Intervening on Behalf of a Child in a Public Place," by Jan Hunt, M.Sc., and The Natural Child Project.*

Should you need more information about this or other parenting concerns, call **1-800-CHILDREN** (1.800.244.5373)

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