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Never Too Young to Survive

In today's world, your kids might need to be their own bodyguards in an emergency. Parent, police officer and CrossFit Defense coach Rick Randolph explains how to prepare your children for a life-threatening situation.

By Rick Randolph

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All Photos: Sally Randolph

I play fight with my kids a lot—slap boxing, wrestling them on the bed. The two oldest love it; the baby just paws at my face and giggles. They drop down into fighting stances—fists clenched, hands up—and sneer. My 7-year-old daughter likes to throw a jab-cross-hook combo and finish with a knee. She hit me with it the other day and said, "I'm gonna kick your ass! I mean, butt. Sorry, dad."

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We need to teach our kids that in the real world, winning means survival.

But they also know we are playing and dad is not going all out. They know they can't beat me in a "real fight."

The problem is they have no idea what a real fight is. They think real fights are the videos of dad in a cage with a referee and an opponent. They know they can't beat me there. In fact, my 10-year-old son thinks dad can beat up anyone in the world if I want. He thinks I'm invincible.

It recently occurred to me that I spend all this time coaching other people's kids on self-defense, and I wondered if I do enough training with my own. I hadn't even talked to them about the December 2012 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut.

How to "Win"

I asked my kids, "Who would win a real fight between a 200-lb. man and a 10-year-old girl?" They were sure the girl would lose. I asked why. They explained the man is too big and strong and could hurt the girl if she fought him. I asked what a win would look like for the girl. They said she would have to beat up the man, maybe give him a bloody nose or a black eye.

The problem, I explained to them, was the way they envisioned a win. They thought a win looked like a referee holding both fighters' hands, then raising the winner's. They saw a win as holding the bad guy down until the police got there to take him to jail. That's when I showed them a video of an attempted abduction of a 10-year-old girl by a real bad guy.

In the video, the bad guy approaches a group of children on the street from behind and grabs a girl. She flails, screams and kicks until the bad guy decides the kid isn't worth the effort. He drops her and runs away. I asked my kids if that was a real fight. Both, wide-eyed, said it was. I asked who won. "The little girl," they both said.

The problem for my kids—and most people for that matter—is the way they see a win. A win, in a self-defense situation, is getting home safe.

Hell, yeah. If that was the equivalent of a UFC fight, the referee was raising that little girl's hand while doctors attended to an unconscious bad guy. She'd have her picture on a cereal box. Upset of the year. Huge win. But it happens. Every day.

The problem for my kids—and most people for that matter—is the way they see a win. A win, in a self-defense situation, is getting home safe. Bad guys don't want a fight, I told them; they want a victim. You don't have to "beat" a bad guy; you have to give him a fight. If you give them a fight, most bad guys will go find a victim. That's how a 10-year-old gets her hand raised in victory. That's how she "wins" against a grown man. I told them the secret about bad guys that my coach, Tony Blauer, taught me: bad guys don't want to get hurt, don't want to get caught and don't want it to take too long. Make one of those three things happen and you can "win."

"If It Was Fight or Die, I'd Fight Him"

And then came Sandy Hook.

I didn't know what to tell my kids. That bad guy didn't care about getting hurt or caught. I thought maybe it was better not to tell them. My boy is a bit of a worrier and an over-thinker. I have found, however, that his worry is often eliminated if he has a plan. So we made one.

I started with statistics and said it would probably never happen to them. I told them we were just talking about it on the off chance it ever did.

I told them there were three things they needed to do if a bad guy came to their school:

First, I told them to run away. If they could do so safely, they should run as fast and as far as they could until they couldn't hear any gunshots. I told them the rules no longer applied. If the principal normally said they weren't allowed to climb a certain fence or go in a certain area or cross a street, now they were allowed to do so. I told them when it comes to self-defense in a worst-case scenario, do what you have to do. When teachers and administrators who are responsible for accurate headcounts are not around or incapacitated, I told my kids I wanted them out of there as fast as possible while still being safe. When teachers and administrators aren't available to help, make your own best decisions, I told them.

I'm not sure who taught me this or where I got it from, but I tell my kids if something bad is happening and they can't find their parents or someone they know, run to any mom for help. Moms have an amazing protective instinct, and I'm pretty sure if any kid ran to my wife and told her some creep was trying to get him, she'd do whatever she could to protect him. Moms are crazy that way—awesome crazy.

Finally, I told them—as I watched my wife swallow hard—that if they had no other choice, they should fight.

Second, I told them to hide if they couldn't run. I told them to find a place to go where no one would find them, then get small and get quiet—a trash can, a closet, somewhere out of sight. I told them bad guys like that won't be searching every crevice; they are looking for quick, easy targets.

Finally, I told them—as I watched my wife swallow hard—that if they had no other choice, they should fight.

"You want me to fight a grown-up with a gun?" my son asked.

"If you can't get away or hide, what else can you do?" I asked.

"If it was fight or die, I'd fight him," he replied.

I told my kids to get the teacher to help. I told them to grab other kids to help—I want to do a drill to see how many 10-year-olds it requires to take me down. I told them to grab scissors, baseball bats, chairs, whatever they could find. My son nodded. So did my daughter. I explained that their job was to get home to see their mom and me. Like Coach Blauer says, "Even kids might need to be their own bodyguards."

It's unthinkable I even had to discuss it with a 10- and 7-year-old. In fact, as the time grew between us and Sandy Hook, it started to seem less important.

But then I read a story about a woman in New Jersey who saved herself from an attacker who broke into her house, as well as a report about another high-school student who brought a shotgun to school in Southern California and was confronted by two teachers. And I remembered the things I want—the things we need—kids to know.

Ultimately, even at 10 and 7 years old, my kids are responsible for their own safety.

I want to put my kids in a bubble and not let anyone touch them, but I know that isn't realistic. I want to assure them a shooting or abduction would never happen, but, honestly, I can't. I want them to get to be kids and not have to worry about all that garbage and sickness in the world, but what I really need them to know and understand is that ultimately, even at 10 and 7 years old, they are responsible for their own safety. Even though it's difficult for dads and moms to think about, it's the least we can do.

My son said it best, "Being a dad isn't always easy, but it's your job."

It's our duty to protect them and—more importantly—to teach them to protect themselves.



First, run. Second, hide. Then, when there's no other option, fight.

About the Author

Rick Randolph is a CrossFit Level 1 and CrossFit Kids trainer. He trains at CrossFit Anywhere in Folsom, Calif. He is a CrossFit Defense Coach and a Blauer Tactical Systems SPEAR law-enforcement and military coach, a Personal Defense Readiness coach, and a member of Tony Blauer's mobile Training Team. He is a full-time police officer and defensive-tactics trainer at the Roseville Police Department.