



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

Senator Smith Urges Parents To Teach Kids To Protect Themselves From Potential Abductors

Malcolm A. Smith

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With National Missing Children's Day approaching, and days after a New York City girl thwarted a would-be kidnapper, State Senator Malcolm Smith (D-Queens) today urged parents to teach their kids how to protect themselves from predators seeking to do them harm.

"On May 25th we will observe National Missing Children's Day," said Senator Smith. "On that day, I am encouraging all New Yorkers to say a silent prayer of comfort and hope for the families of those whose children have yet to return home; a prayer of strength for the law enforcement officials who work so hard to track down and rescue these children; and a prayer of resolve for ourselves to do whatever is necessary to protect our own children."

According to the most recent FBI statistics, more than 662,000 children were reported missing in 2005. 58% of them were girls; 33% were African-American.

Nearly 17,000 cases were classified by local police agencies as "endangered," meaning the child may have been kidnapped or in the company of a dangerous adult.

"To hear that the number of missing children in this country is higher than the population of the City of Baltimore is stunning," said Senator Smith. "Having a child go missing is a parent's worst nightmare. Even the specter of such an event happening can spur a mom or dad into extra vigilance. It's important, though, to use such cautiousness to be proactive and teach children the lessons necessary to keep them safe and out of harm's way."

The Queens lawmaker also cited an October 2006 report by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that studied more than 400 attempted abductions nationwide between February 2005 and July 2006. According to the report, 6 in 10 victims successfully foiled their attackers by fighting back, 3 in 10 ran away before any physical contact, and about 10% were saved when an adult nearby intervened.

"These numbers tell me that many children get it: that they do not have to be a willing victims of an abduction, and that's it's OK to fight back," Senator Smith said.

Senator Smith hailed 11-year-old Xochil Garcia of Brooklyn – who fended off a Mother's Day attack by a man who was eight years older, a foot-and-a-half taller, and at least 100 pounds heavier – as an example of how children can protect themselves.

The diminutive New Yorker was on her way back to her apartment when a 19-year-old man allegedly grabbed her in her apartment stairwell and attempted to take her to the roof. After managing to break free from the suspect's grasp and going for help, Xochil identified the attacker, who was then apprehended by her brother and neighbors.

"Potential abductors count on the element of surprise to eliminate any chance of resistance," Senator Smith said. "Xochil exhibited great bravery and intelligence in fighting off her attacker and getting help. She had a plan for situations like this and she didn't panic when it came time to execute it. That's one smart young girl!"

Senator Smith said there are three basic tips that parents should teach their kids:

- Be aware of your surroundings: Look around and pay close attention to situations or actions that would make you feel uncomfortable.
- Make it as difficult as possible for someone to grab you: If someone tries to take you somewhere, scream for help. Yell "No, Stop! I don't know this person! Someone is trying to take me away!" Get away from the abductor – kick and punch if you have to – then notify a police officer or another adult.
- If someone follows you on foot or in a car, run to a safe place, like a friend's or neighbor's house or a store.

"Something else to consider: When a child is abducted, seconds count. Police officers need the most up-to-date information available," said Senator Smith. "A current photo and updated physical data is a critical tool in finding and returning missing children."

Senator Smith said the SAFE CHILD Card is one way to have a child's information readily available. These cards contain the child's name; biographical information such as date of birth, gender, height, weight, hair color, and eye color; and a fingerprint image of both index fingers. The card takes less than two minutes to make and can be easily carried in a wallet or pocketbook.

"These cards provide peace of mind as well as a vital source of information at your fingertips," said Senator Smith. "It is also a reminder to your children that you are looking out for their safety."

SAFE CHILD Cards are available at 33 law enforcement agencies across the state and during special events. For the nearest locations and latest information, log on to the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services website at www.criminaljustice.state.ny.us/pio/safechild.htm.

"Being a parent means being committed to protecting our children. While we can safeguard them at home, we know that we won't always be there for them outside

those walls," Senator Smith concluded. "That's why it's important to teach children how to protect themselves from those who want to do them harm. Of all the lessons we impart, this one may be the most important."
