

Local

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY NEWS

Safety Towners receive course in stranger danger

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About 75 soon-to-be kindergartners and first-graders gathered at Foothill Elementary School on Wednesday afternoon to learn about stranger danger.

The event was hosted by Santa Barbara Soroptimists Safety Town Camp and coordinated by Child Abuse Listening Mediation.

CALM representative Ann Bryant helped lead the group of Safety Towners in lessons about how to react during inappropriate situations with strangers.

Lessons included how to say no, crying for help, and finding appropriate grown-ups to tell. A second lesson was given on the difference between good, bad and secret touches.

"It is important that children learn these techniques as they enter into the next phase of their life," Ms. Bryant said. "Children interact with numerous different people a day and it is important that they can differentiate between a good and bad situation."

She said 90 percent of reported incidents are caused by somebody that children know and trust.

As the children sat attentively among 25 volunteers, question after question was asked about good,



NIK BLASKOVICH/NEWS-PRESS

Ann Bryant, prevention and parenting coordinator of CALM, teaches children about "good touch" and "bad touch" during a session Wednesday at Foothill Elementary School.

bad and secret touches.

As Ms. Bryant received various examples of what signified as each touch, she came to one main point.

"Nobody is allowed to hit you, make you bleed, give you bruises or touch you somewhere that makes you feel uncomfortable," she said to

the children. "Not a stranger, not a friend and not even a family member — absolutely no one."

When Ms. Bryant heard a child ask about tattling, she said, "It is not tattling if someone tries to harm you or act in an inappropriate way. It still important you tell someone."

Students practiced their techniques by giving a "Superhero Safety Yell" and running away from the threat.

"It just feels good to help teach these children lessons that they might not get at home or school," said Jo Bittner, co-director of the event. "I hope the kids gained a sense of confidence to react in the case of an emergency."

About 30 parents attended Wednesday.

Piero Zelli, a father of two, said he believes it is important that his children relearn the lessons he provides at home.

"Children are very vulnerable during this time in their life and need to know about these dangers," he said.

At least one person in attendance understood the importance of Safety Town's lessons.

"It is because of Safety Town teachers like Ms. Bittner and Ms. Bryant that made me want to come back as a volunteer," said 12-year-old Sophie Coito, a Safety Town graduate. "Safety Town teaches you that your voice is important, especially in situations like these when a person's voice matters most."

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