

# SAFE TEEN PROGRAM

by Tonia Jurbin

"Let's stop being victims and take a stand!" is the message Misty Cockerill gave at Take Back the Night Rally in Abbotsford in September. Misty Cockerill is the young woman who was savagely beaten with a baseball bat and survived the ordeal. She has not only testified against the alleged suspect, but she has spoken out about the problems that women face, explaining, "Women must show we're not weak and vulnerable." Anita Roberts, founder and coordinator of Safe Teen shares those sentiments and has been actively working with schools to deliver her message of empowerment through assault prevention programs since 1984.

Roberts is the founder and coordinator of the Safe Teen Program, which offers Assault Prevention Programs for students grade 6 and up, and also delivers workshops to any group of women who want training in assault prevention and handling fear. She has a mostly part-time staff of three men and three women who deliver training to schools all over British Columbia, parts of the Yukon and the U.S. The program teaches assertive body language and the verbal skills that are needed to effectively deal with peer pressure and harassment. It also shows how to de-escalate dangerous situations. The students learn how to define healthy relationships and self worth.

Safe Teen explores the typically submissive behaviour of women and teaches assertive behaviours through lectures and role-playing. For example, she will ask the girls to look each other straight in the eye without smiling, or to try not to say "I'm sorry" all the time. In addition to identifying submissive behaviour, Safe Teen teaches assertive behaviour. Using the "broken record" technique, teens learn that if you don't want to do something, say so three times, using the exact same words each time while making eye contact. The class practices these new skills by role-playing, an important part of the program as it gives the students a

chance to exercise their new skills in a safe environment.

The philosophy is to empower women by teaching them how to access their inner strength; that is, the "wise woman" as opposed to the "child" who begs and pleads, or the "bitch" who exacerbates problems by screaming, pushing or getting angry.

Younger girls learn to access the "strong girl" as opposed to the "tiny whiny" girl who will cry and fidget, or the "angry girl" who will have a tantrum. The "strong girl" learns to say, "I don't like how close you are sitting. I don't like how close you are sitting. I don't like how close you are sitting."

Working with the boys is a little different, explains Ms. Roberts. "We have to be careful because we don't want them to feel bad about being men. We have to teach them what is good about being a man, and that men who feel good about themselves don't hurt women." We offer an alternative to the macho stereotype; we also address male-to-male violence and teach skills needed to walk away from a fight without feeling like a jerk.

Boys learn the same skills but there is more emphasis on how to protect yourself from bigger boys and bullies. Training also explores how violence affects women and girls in a different way, by asking, "How do you think a girl would feel if this happened to her." Roberts makes sure that everyone understands what rape and assault is. With very young children her advice is to use only the correct names for all of the body parts and role-play often. Ask your child, "What if a bad man asks you to take your clothes off?" The answer is "Yell, No! Run and tell!" Let your child actually yell "No!" and run and tell. Play this game often, acting out the parts with your child and then use variations, asking about a teacher, uncle or baby-sitter.

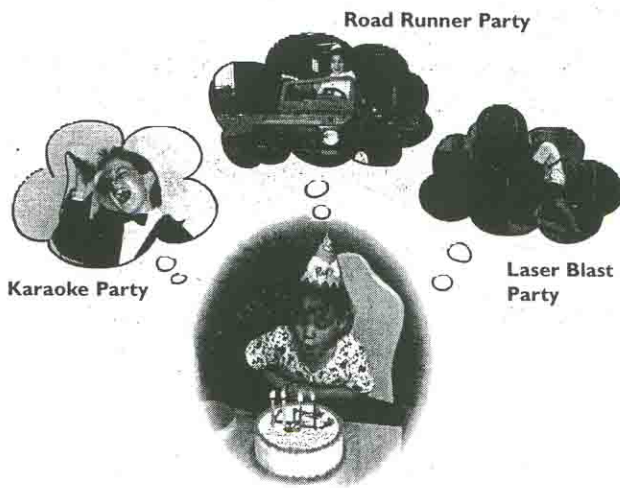
Although Roberts has no specific program for young children and toddlers, it is only because her current programs are in such high demand that

she has no time to develop any more programs. She says, "The principles for teaching these skills are the same; all that will change with the very young audience is language." She has created songs and games that she has used with her own children and plans to develop a program in the future.

The school programs are approximately three hours long and can be delivered over a period of sessions, or all

at once. The program costs about \$300 for schools, plus the travelling costs for areas outside the Lower Mainland. Adult workshops can be customized to meet a specific group's requirements and available funding; generally a one-day workshop will cost about \$900. If Safe Teen is not offered in your child's school, lobby to make the program available. Call (604)255-5147 for more information.

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