

# Safety lessons --- with a kick

Cover story Protecting children



Divya Joshi, 7, knees instructor David Neal in the groin to break free from his grasp as she and other Girl Scout Brownies participate in the Revved Up Kids workshop in Johns Creek. The workshop combines safety tips with self-defense moves to help children escape danger. [Brita Honarvar bhc.harvar@ajc.com](mailto:Brita.Honarvar@ajc.com)

## Johns Creek company arms kids with tools to protect themselves. They're taught where to hit 'bad grown-ups.'

Helena Oliviero / Staff

A dozen Girl Scout Brownies stand up to learn a new song set to the tune of "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes."

But they aren't gathered around a cozy campfire toasting marshmallows as they sing. Instead, they are sneaker-clad and ready to fight.

Inside a Johns Creek golf course rec room, the troop belts out the new lyrics to the old melody --- lyrics that seem equally sobering and surprising when sung by a group of 7- and 8-year-old girls.

"Groin, knees and shins and feet, shins and feet ... eyes and nose, and throat and solar plexus, too. Groin, knees and shins and feet, shins and feet."

After finishing the song, they kick and slam a punching dummy and pummel a padded instructor.

The exercise, part of a safety workshop led by a new Johns Creek-based company called Revved Up Kids, is designed to help the girls learn about the body. Not their own, but precisely where to strike if ever a "bad grown-up" ever tries to snatch them out in public.

"Be strong," insists Allison Neal, who founded Revved Up Kids last year with her husband, David Neal. "We want you to learn how to use your voice and body to let people know they shouldn't mess with you."



### Better safe than sorry

Revved Up's approach may sound extreme. Any parent knows there can be a fine line between arming their children with the tools and knowledge they need to be safe and alarming them to the point they aren't constantly looking over their shoulders in fear. But for Neal and many of the parents in attendance, the goal is to prepare children for the worst.

Neal said she spent almost two years researching data and creating a curriculum before offering her workshops. She likens teaching young children safety skills and basic self-defense to requiring them to wear a helmet when riding a bike. Chances are the kids won't need it, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

Meanwhile, it is estimated that one in four girls and one in six boys in the United States will be sexually exploited, according to the National Center for Victims of Crime. Abuse can include everything from an online predator making contact to a neighbor

down the street physically harming a child.

.....for the parents of the Brownies at the Johns Creek workshop, including Rachelle Schaffer, co-leader of the troop, Revved Up Kids gets a thumbs up. Schaffer said the compact workshop provided a solid overview and would help get the conversation started about a very uncomfortable subject.

"These are things that are very hard to talk about; this is something we can build on," she said. "It's a good ice breaker."

### Shouting, biting, learning

Inside the Johns Creek clubhouse, the Brownies practice filling their bellies with air and shouting "No!" They rehearse biting really hard by sinking their teeth into red apples.

They are told that while most adults are nice and helpful, there's a small number who are "sick in the head" and may want to hurt them. It's not only the complete stranger who can do harm, they

they are told. Other, more familiar adults in their lives --- at school, at church, on their street --- also could pose a danger.

Rachelle Schaffer's daughter Jenna, 8, says she has learned that adults don't need help from children for things like looking for a lost puppy or getting directions. Eight-year-old Amanda Klein says she liked the class. It was long and

she looks tired, but she liked "punching [the dummy] Bob."

For the young girls, this workshop has been an investment with a payoff. The troop decided to pay for it with proceeds from Girl Scout cookie sales. And each will receive a triangular-shaped safety badge to pin onto their vests when the class is over.

Things end on a gooey note. As a last exercise, the girls press their fingers into boiled egg yolks to learn what it feels like poking someone's eye out. It goes over well.

Well enough that Neal adds one more safety tip: "Don't go home and practice this on your friends or little brother!"



David Neal, co-founder of Revved Up Kids (left), takes a beating from Abby Freyer, 8. In teaching safety techniques, the company's goal is to prepare kids for the worst. Photos by [Bita Honarvar](mailto:Bita.Honarvar@ajc.com) [bhonarvar@ajc.com](mailto:bhonarvar@ajc.com)