

You Can "Block Off" Trouble!

If you fear for your child's safety as he walks to and from school, follow the lead of other concerned parents—and organize a Block Parent Plan in your neighborhood

By NORAH SMARIDGE

WHEN LITTLE GIRLS are lost, they are supposed to be terribly frightened. But that wasn't the case with the pony-tailed tot who stood on Mrs. Anita Hills' porch when she went to answer her doorbell.

"I don't know where my house is. Would you tell me, please?" the youngster piped cheerfully.

Mrs. Hills invited her inside, and the little girl continued in a matter-of-fact way:

"We just moved here—and I already know how to get to and from school by myself. But today I guess I forgot. Would you show me?"

Mrs. Hills asked the little girl's name, telephoned the school, and within minutes had the child's address and was walking her home.

The terror of being lost is universal among children. The little girl who stopped at Mrs. Hills' door was no more immune to it than any other youngster. But one factor made a difference—she attended Halcyon School in San Leandro, Calif.

Pupils at Halcyon can stray far from their familiar routes and still find in every block a sign that reads "BP." The letters stand for "block parent," but to a youngster they say: "Here's a friend who can help me."

San Leandro is the home of the Block Parent Plan. It was not specifically designed to assist lost children, but it has been of great help in such instances. The plan was initiated about five years ago, when the parents of Halcyon School pupils were becoming worried about the increase

in crimes against small children. "We need more eyes on the street," one mother observed. "The police can't supervise such a wide area. We ought to take a hand in it ourselves." So the parents came up with their

unusual plan for safeguarding youngsters against injury and molestation. Put into operation with the co-operation of the P. T. A. and the San Leandro police department, it has proved both sane and workable.

Can other communities do what San Leandro has done? Certainly. Many cities already have set up similar plans, so if you and your neighbors feel your area needs a Block Parent Plan, begin by taking these steps:

1. Organize under the sponsorship of the P.T.A. or some other stable, respected neighborhood group.
2. Get the support of your school's principal. Allow him to decide whether your committee or his staff should

teach the children the meaning of the Block Parent sign.

3. Get permission to use school files for compiling a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers of all parents of children in your school.

4. Mail letters to each home, explaining the need of a Block Parent Plan in your area, and ask for full co-operation and assistance. Ask those who would like to volunteer to call the chairman of your committee. (Don't

let them upset school routine by telephoning there!)

5. Keep a record listing volunteers and this information:

Name of the proposed Block Parent, number of adults living in the house, number of children under 12 living there, the husband's occupation, the hours that he is away from home, and the wife's occupation. Information offered by other sources than the volunteer (for instance, neighbors and teachers) are noted on the card.

This may sound like an excessive amount of checking. But it isn't. People have volunteered who have alcoholics or persons with contagious diseases in their homes. Such volunteers, of course, are rejected.

In San Leandro, all block parents agreed to be fingerprinted and checked for criminal records. Not all communities may wish to go to such lengths. These measures, however, help reassure parents that a home with a Block Parent sign has been thoroughly investigated and found safe.

BLOCK PARENTS themselves must be protected against liability. To this end, the following rules should be explained to them and written on the backs of the signs they display in their windows.

1. Do not transport youngsters in your car. Call the proper person for the child's particular problem.

(a) Lost child under school age, call your police department.

(b) Lost child of school age, call your school.

(c) Slightly injured child, send on to school or back to his home.

(d) Seriously injured child, call school or parent.

(e) Critically injured child, call police for aid. They will call an ambulance, if necessary.

2. In case of injury, do not administer first aid except to stop excessive bleeding or restore breathing. Contact parent, school, or police.

3. Do not offer food or beverages to any youngster. Some children are allergic to certain foods.

4. A report must be made to your committee chairman within four hours after the child is helped.

5. When a child has been frightened by a stranger, notify the police and committee chairman immediately.

Once the plan is in action, parents must do their share. They must remind their children continually to go to the Block Parent when in trouble. The Block Parent is not asked to go out and look for children in distress.

When the Block Parent plan is established in a community, parents rest easier. Not only does the plan provide help in dozens of minor mishaps, but it is an efficient way of protecting small children against the many hazards of modern-day living.

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