

HOW CAN WE HELP OUR CHILDREN?

For years, many people have been told not to panic about the risk from paedophiles, child killers and violent sex offenders, but how can we say that? How can we explain appalling crimes such as the murder of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman? Fortunately cases like this are still extremely rare and the extraordinary publicity surrounding this double abduction is a testament to the unusual nature of the crime.

Sadly however, the rare nature of these phenomena does not mean that they are less important as other news, in fact, the scandal of the murder of Holly and Jessica has deeply shocked the public. The two children, both ten, vanished on August 4 2002, shortly after being seen walking near their homes in Soham Cambridgeshire. Their bodies were discovered in a

ditch near Lakenheath, Suffolk, on August 17.

After an enquiry, police found that Ian Huntley a 28-year-old former caretaker at a Soham secondary school had killed the girls and accused him of murder. His partner, Maxine Carr, aged 25, a teaching assistant in Holly and Jessica's class at a Soham primary school, was accused of conspiring to pervert the course of justice. For 12 days, many came to regard Holly and Jessica almost as their own children. The murder of the two little girls led us to question the security of our public institutions and their trustworthiness, but also how our families can face this terrible problem, particularly with our own children.

What do parents tell their children about death? How do they balance the equation between reassurance and terror? These are difficult questions, which are not easy to answer. We can only attempt to find a solution to save people from these events. One possible solution is for better collaboration between the family and the Government: both these institutions must find effective measures to

solve the situation. For example, it's very important to campaign in schools to inform children of risks in society and it is also necessary for more control of Web sites to stop the exchange of erotic-photos of children. The family must give more importance to their relationship with their children through more

conversation and understanding which

will help children be more aware of strangers. However, often the problem begins when the children have no points of reference within their family because their parents are occupied with their work and with their own private problems: in this situation children are free to behave as they want because nobody pays them any attention. In this context it is possible that children can be shocked and influenced by the mass media as well, particularly by television and Internet, which could lead to dangerous consequences. All these elements are parts of an enormous and bitter problem hard to solve, but not impossible.



Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman