

# Guardian ON GUARD

It's hard enough knowing what to do when you're the victim of crime but when there's a child in your care, there are a lot more defence tactics to consider and implement....

## IN A MUGGING

Experts agree it's best to avoid confrontation, and to give the mugger what he wants. 'Position yourself so that the child is behind you or, if you're carrying the child, hold him or her to one side,' says Warren Ho, a martial-arts practitioner and owner of Defence Unlimited in Johannesburg.

If the child is in a pram, move away from it to direct the mugger's attention towards you instead. Tell him you'll give him what he's demanding and explain that you're reaching for it in your bag or your pocket. Suggest in a slow, assertive and polite manner that he take the item and leave you alone. 'Keep your hand or hands up, palms facing him, to show him that you're defenceless. This tactic also creates a barrier between you and the mugger and provides the perfect position to counter any attack,' says Ho.

## IN A HOUSE BREAK-IN

If the robbers are already inside the house and you're able to take the child and get out, do so immediately. 'If it isn't possible, you can either cooperate with the perpetrators, or fight for your (and the child's) life should they pose a threat to either of you,' says Ho. 'You could suggest that they lock you and the child in the bedroom where you won't disturb them.' Once there, secure the door to prevent them coming in, and keep yourself and the child warm – shock can make you feel cold, and can cause uncontrollable shaking, nausea and irrational responses.



*Calm and clear-headed decisions are your best defence when faced with crime while looking after a child*

## IN A FIGHT

Any survival-instinct-driven action – biting, scratching, hitting, screaming and using any object around you as a weapon – is recommended, says Ho. 'Although controlled aggression is preferable in a fight, it might be extreme blind rage that will help you survive,' he says. Fight hard and don't stop until the attackers are incapacitated, giving you an opportunity to escape.

## IN A HIJACKING

If it's already too late for you to drive off and the hijacker at your window has produced a weapon to get you out of the car, stay calm, says Ho. Remove

your seat belt and get out, avoiding sudden movements and eye contact. 'Once outside, tell him that you have a child in the car who you want to take with you so that he doesn't have the burden of dealing with a child later,' says Ho. Once you've taken the child out, back away slowly.

'If the hijacker has climbed into your car while you're still in it, try to get yourself and the child out by telling him he wouldn't want the responsibility of having you and the child around,' says Cape Town self-defence expert Sanette Smit. If he tells you to stay in the car and drive to a different location, avoid doing so at all costs, she says. Make yourself an undesirable and inconvenient hostage. 'For example, you could say (and show him) that you're so nervous that you can no longer drive – or you could fake an illness,' says Ho. 'It may appear extreme but you could even defecate in your car to indicate that you're not willing to drive with him.' ☞