

## **GIRL SAYS SHE MADE UP STORY ABOUT ABDUCTION, RAPE**

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A 9-year-old girl made up her story of being abducted at gunpoint and sexually assaulted this week in woods near her home, police said Thursday.

"It was a hoax," said Ocoee police Sgt. Ken Fisher. "The story changed from the original story. She finally decided to say it didn't happen."

The elementary school student confessed to police and Orange County Sheriff's Office investigators while recounting her story at the site where she said she had been attacked.

"There were some logistical things - the direction of travel the suspect took - that would change," said police Detective Ted Silberstein. "It didn't hold up. Things were different each time we talked to her."

After she admitted she had made up the story, police took her to a sheriff's substation, where she was confronted and again admitted she had lied.

"The daughter made it clear to her (mother) that it truly did not happen," Silberstein said.

"It just devastated me," the mother said later, adding, "I would rather the truth come out any day than have a child grow up living a lie."

The mother, a law enforcement officer, said the girl was a victim of sexual abuse several years ago. Her attacker is serving a prison sentence for lewd and lascivious assault.

According to the woman, her daughter had learned recently in school how to avoid being abducted, and on the day she reported the attack, she had been concerned about getting into trouble for staying out too late.

Before Thursday, the mother said she had no indication from Ocoee police that there were discrepancies in her daughter's story.

"I acted on the same information the news media was acting on, which is what she told us," the girl's mother said.

Ocoee residents responded with fear and outrage after the girl reported that a stranger had forced her into a car on Ocoee Hills Road on Monday afternoon. She said the attacker took her to woods near Clark Road, and, at gunpoint, forced her to disrobe before he sexually assaulted her.

The mother said she plans to seek counseling for her daughter. She praised the community for its outpouring of support and hailed the work of detectives from the Sheriff's Office sex-crimes unit.

Sgt. Ken Cox of the Orange County sheriff's sex-crimes unit said detectives knew the girl as a victim from the sex case two years ago. They also noticed inconsistencies in her story when she was interviewed Wednesday by the child-protection team at Orlando Regional Medical Center.

One of the girl's friends told detectives the girl had discussed the abduction Monday before it was reported. "Of course, that threw up a big red flag for us," Cox said.

Detectives also learned that the woman to whose house the girl went to report the attack was outside at the time and would have seen the attack if it had occurred.

Nora Gledich, principal at the girl's elementary school, said that because of the rape story, more parents had been picking up children instead of letting them ride bicycles or walk to class.

The Police Department had received more than 100 calls with tips or reported sightings of the alleged attacker.

"The plus part about this is our community really banded together," Fisher said.

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