

SIGNALLING

distress

It's dark and getting late, and your child hasn't come home. Abduction is a parent's worst nightmare, but for the Morcombe family it's a grim reality. Caitlin Ganter spoke with Dr Rachel Grieve about a new defence for children at risk

Bruce and Denise Morcombe know the heartache of child abduction all too well. In December 2003, their 13-year-old son Daniel vanished from a bus stop on the Sunshine Coast. Eight years later, the Morcombes are still struggling with their loss and fighting to save other children from Daniel's fate.

In collaboration with Dr Rachel Grieve, psychology lecturer at ACU's Brisbane campus, the Morcombes are investigating the viability of a child-in-danger distress signal, which involves crossing arms above the head then opening and closing the hands in a blinking motion.

Dr Grieve became involved in the project after hearing the Morcombes discuss the signal on radio.

"I was driving to work and I heard Bruce and Denise explaining the child-in-danger signal, and straight away I wanted to be involved," she said.

"I contacted the Morcombe Foundation and volunteered my research experience. Essentially, I'm starting by researching parents and teachers willingness to adopt the new signal, and if all goes well I'll be assessing methodology and recommending best practice to teach children the signal.

"It's important to have systematic, scientific research to prove the viability of the project in order to obtain funding and support from government and other organisations.

"Obviously in the case of children at risk of abduction we want them to run away and shout. But for children unable to run away, this signal could be a lifesaving way of drawing attention."

"We're hoping for it to become universally recognised so children can apply it to any situation. For example, if their friend has become ill, or if they have hurt themselves in the playground, they can perform this signal to draw attention."

Dr Grieve is conducting the research free-of-charge, and said the Morcombes were remarkable people.

"I'm honoured to be involved in this project... Bruce and Denise are amazing and their dedication to child safety is inspirational."

