It was a summer day in July 1976 when 26 kids between five and fifteen years of age boarded an elementary school bus to go home. Many of the children were still dripping with water from the water balloon fight they’d just had. Spirits were high as the bus drove along. None of them could have imagined that a few hours later they’d be involved in the biggest kidnapping in United States history. Suddenly, a van blocked their path. The bus driver slowed to a stop and asked if the three men in the van needed help. The men in the van had something terrible up their sleeves. With pantyhose over their heads and guns in hand, they boarded the bus. The men drove the bus to a rock quarry owned by one of the kidnappers’ fathers. The masked men planned to ask for $5 million in ransom money in exchange for the safe return of the children. Their plan would soon backfire. The entire town was making calls trying to find their children, so all of the phone lines were busy. The kidnappers never got a chance to make a call. In the meantime, they forced the children and their bus driver to climb down a ladder into the back of a tractor trailer that was buried six feet underground. Inside the truck, the children were terrified. But one boy in particular was not. Fourteen-year-old Bob Barklay took action. With the help of their heroic bus driver, Bob organized the other children in a plan to escape. They stacked the mattresses they’d been sitting on, one on top of the other. Then, they began to dig up and out of a hole in the truck’s roof. With time, they had a hole big enough to escape from. Covered in dirt and completely worn out, the children and their bus driver stumbled to a small building where one man sat. Upon seeing them, he said, “The world’s been looking for you!” The three kidnappers were arrested. Thirty hours after the start of the kidnapping, the children were reunited with their parents. They were physically healthy but not without a painful memory of the ordeal. All 26 children showed signs of psychological trauma, with one exception. Bob Barklay, came out of the nightmare not only a hero but with fewer signs of trauma. Psychologists have since studied Barklay’s case. Many say that the other children experienced a level of helplessness that Bob did not. Because he kept moving and believed that his actions mattered, he kept his nervous system from being traumatized. Barklay showed that hope and belief in the power of taking action is the key to safeguarding mental health in the face of danger.

Ludwig van Beethoven was one of the greatest composers of all time. Yet by the time he was writing his last few masterpieces he was completely deaf. Beethoven wasn’t born deaf. He gradually lost all his hearing from the age of 30 onwards. He first had an inkling something was wrong when he began to hear buzzing noises in his ears. He was only 26 at the time. Beethoven kept his hearing problems a secret. He believed the truth would ruin his blossoming career. By the time he turned 30, Beethoven feared he was growing deaf. He complained to a doctor that his hearing had grown weaker over the previous three years. He explained he could not hear the high notes unless he was standing very close to the musicians. Beethoven wrote, “For two years I have avoided almost all social gatherings. It is impossible for me to say to people ‘I am deaf.’ If I belonged to any other profession it would be easier.” Fellow composer Ferdinand Ries recalled a turning point in Beethoven’s deafness. During a walk in the country, the two musicians saw a shepherd playing a pipe. Beethoven could see by his friend’s expression the shepherd was playing beautiful music. All Beethoven could hear was the sound of silence. The composer was no longer the same after the incident. He had finally confronted and surrendered to his loss of hearing. By the age of 44, Beethoven was almost completely deaf. He could no longer hear other people’s voices or the sounds of his beloved countryside. No-one knows what exactly caused Beethoven’s deafness. A range of causes has been blamed. It could have been syphilis, lead poisoning, or typhus. It could even have been the composer’s habit of burying his head in a bucket of ice water to stay awake. Beethoven often blamed his deafness on a fall. He also suggested gastrointestinal problems were the cause. Whatever the reason, Beethoven refused to let his deafness conquer his passion. He continued to write music. Although he could no longer hear the music, he could still feel and imagine it. Beethoven’s housekeepers recall watching him sit at the piano with a pencil in his mouth. With the other end, he would touch the piano’s soundboard to feel the note’s vibration. Beethoven wrote his famed Ninth Symphony without ever hearing a note of it. Upon its premiere, Beethoven insisted upon conducting. The orchestra hired another conductor to stand next to him. The orchestra followed his lead instead of the man who had composed the piece. When the music was over, the audience broke out into applause. Beethoven didn’t hear any of it. Take the Vocabulary Quiz.