



# Every Parent's Guide to Achieving the **Ultimate Safe Family**

by Samantha Wilson



# Every Parent's Guide

## to Achieving the Ultimate Safe Family

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# Hello!

Thank you for taking the time to download and read this eBook. I am delighted that you have found my blog, or had a friend pass it on to you. I believe that it takes a community to keep kids safe, and the more information sharing that happens, the better off we are as a society.

I am thrilled to be able to share some of my insights and tips that I have learned over the years as a police officer, parent and founder of Kidproof Safety, the world's largest child safety education franchise.

[Kidproof](#) started as a small community service based in Canada and for more than a decade, has grown into a leading force in proactive, preventative child safety education around the globe.

I have dedicated my life to helping parents, kids and educators teach kids how to make safe choices as they grow and seek more independence. My goal is to give parents and educators the information and tools they need to help answer the tough questions relating to the Internet, Bullying, Abduction plus many more difficult subjects every parent must face.

As a former police officer I learned that crimes can be prevented because violence is predictable. The problem was that most people, kids and parents, were not taught how to recognize the warning signs early enough to reduce the risks and stay safe. That is where this book comes in.

I believe that parents have more control than the newspapers and media hype lead them to believe, and they are not alone in their quest for safety. Being safe is one thing—but to “feel” safe takes some effort. We can lock our doors, screen our calls, be mindful of those around us, but if we are not confident in our choices, we remain afraid.

It is my job to help parents and kids gain the same sense of calmness and confidence that I feel when it comes to keeping my family safe. I invite you to take advantage of this eBook, and every other resource at my blog [www.samanthawilson.com](http://www.samanthawilson.com)

*S. Wilson*



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If at any point while you're reading this eBook, you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. You can best reach me on Twitter (@samanthawilson\_), or on my [Facebook Page](#). If you want to reach me in private you can email me at [Sam@samanthawilson.com](mailto:Sam@samanthawilson.com)

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# Protecting Kids: Whose Job Is It Anyway?

*My heart still misses a beat when I think about a family I met while I was a police officer. In fact, I can feel my chest tighten as I tell the story to you.*

It was six o'clock in the evening and still light outside as I took a police report of a woman's missing eight-year-old son.

"I have street-proofed my son," said the woman. "He knows not to talk to strangers."

The child's disappearance was alarming enough, but the mother's reaction shocked me: I realized that some parents actually think their children can protect themselves.

The woman lived in a nice neighborhood, the sort of neighborhood that most people, passing through, might consider living in. She was well educated, had a good job, and, judging from the books that were displayed in her den, liked to read. She had two children: a ten-year-old girl, and a missing eight-year-old boy.

I noticed a women's magazine on the kitchen counter, with a shout line that read, "Top Ten Spring Projects to Do with Your Kids." A portrait of the woman and her two children was displayed on the wall. The house was clean, and there were neat rows of kids' shoes by the back door.

Missing children reports were not uncommon, but this mother's complete lack of concern caught me off guard. She explained that she was certain her son would never talk to strangers or do anything dangerous. She had actually waited several hours before she called the police, and even then, her actions seemed obligatory at best. She truly believed that her son had the tools and skills he needed to protect himself.

As both a mother and a police officer, I felt differently.

You see, she wasn't necessarily a bad parent. She was just a parent who was not properly informed. She believed that her children were able to protect themselves. She thought all she needed to do was talk to them about the standard child safety issues, such as what would happen if they were abducted, talked to strangers, did drugs, smoked cigarettes, or hung out with the wrong crowd. She made sure to pepper each lesson with a frightening example of the horrible things that could happen to them. Then, miraculously--poof--her kids would be safe!

I had just started collecting the information I needed to begin the search for this little boy when he burst through the front door and threw his coat onto a chair. He stopped hard in front of me. In full uniform, I must have seemed like a giant.

"Where were you?" the woman asked her son, somewhat embarrassed.

"Outside, playing in a fort in the bush," he answered, almost surprised at the question.

The woman quickly apologized for bothering the police, and said that she no longer needed me. I walked over and looked closely at the little boy, who was very small but had huge, innocent eyes. I couldn't help but smile.

"Actually," I said, "you do."

I wanted to share this story with you for two reasons. First, like many stories of children who go missing for brief periods of time, it has a happy ending.

Second, it illustrates the most common threat to your child's safety, a threat that outweighs that of the pedophile, predator, drug dealer, bully and every other thug on the street. The threat I'm talking about is this: shifting the responsibility of protecting kids *onto the kids themselves*.

The responsibility of child safety belongs to everyone. This includes you, me, your neighbors, schools, educators, police, and politicians. Kids themselves should be considered the very last line of defense. Yet all too often children are left to protect themselves.

Of course, I am a hard and fast supporter of child safety education, but there is no such thing as a program that will ultimately keep your kids safe. There is no magic cloak that will shield them from harm and no perfect rule that will never be broken. You see, kids need to learn how to make safe choices, but they need you to reinforce, support, and encourage them from the beginning.

## Safe Parents, Safe Kids

I have no clue what *you* may have been told as a child, or what you might have picked up since you became a parent. Many parents continue to use old tactics that simply don't work in today's world. To be on the safe side, let's start fresh. In the chapters to come, I will cover numerous topics in detail, but for now I want to cover the basics of safe kids and safe families



## *The bottom line is that safe kids have safe parents. What are the traits of safe parents?*

- They provide suitable layers of protection for their children.
- They can distinguish between real and perceived danger.
- They pay attention to situations and details more than places.
- They question the motives of people who come in contact with their family.
- They are aware of the new ways predators lure kids away.
- They recognize their limitations and accept that it takes an entire community to keep their kids safe.



# Layers of Protection

When you think about protecting your kids, you need to consider it in terms of “layering.” Layering is based on the premise that there is no single tool that is magical, fool-proof, criminal-proof and will always keep you safe. When you apply several layers of protection, you increase your chances of success: if one layer fails, the next kicks in.

However, each layer is as important as the next. There is no point in taking the time and effort to add a layer of protection if it is easily defeated. Invest equal amounts of time and energy into each layer, and remember that your child is the first but most vulnerable layer of defense. Prepare for your plan to fail and always have a back-up.

As an example of layering, let’s look at how you can protect your child from drowning if you have a swimming pool.

First, identify the hazard—the swimming pool.

Next, identify the minimum level of protection—your child.

Now apply layers of protection around your child.

## Layer 1 – Your child

Invest in quality swimming instruction and preventive safety education. Teach your child to swim, and about the rules for playing in and around the swimming pool. Keep the pool off-limits to your child except when you or another responsible adult are there to supervise.

## **Layer 2 – Wrist alarm**

Have your child wear a wrist swimming pool alarm. This is an alarm that looks similar to a watch. If the wrist alarm gets wet because the child has waded or fallen into water, the receiver will sound.

## **Layer 3 – Swimming pool alarm**

Install an alarm in your pool that will sound if there is any movement or disturbance to the water.

## **Layer 4 – Physical barriers**

Prevent access to the swimming pool by building a fence around the pool. Ensure that the fence has a secure gate, with a self-closing latch.

## **Layer 5 – Gate and door alarms**

If your child is able to open the gate, have an alarm set to alert you that the gate has been opened. Place a door alarm on all doors to the house that lead to the swimming pool area.

If a door is opened, you will be advised.

## **Layer 6 – Supervise, supervise, supervise**

There is no better way to protect your children than to supervise them. Nothing replaces supervision.

The process of layering used in this example is a good model for protecting your child from any hazard. The ultimate level of protection is always the same: YOU.

To be sure that you are applying the correct layers of protection, you will need to follow some simple guidelines:

1. *Learn about the potential threats.*
2. *Start with the minimum level of protection.*
3. *Build from that level.*
4. *Complete the process with parental supervision whenever possible.*

## Danger—Real or Not?

From the moment that your child was born, he was given a special gift, a power that can help to keep him safe throughout his life. This power is called *instinct*.

How do kids know when their instincts are warning them that something is not right? They might feel “butterflies,” an upset stomach, sweaty hands, or a pounding heart. They might describe the feeling they have as uncomfortable or nervous, or maybe they’ll just say that someone seems “creepy.” Adults may call it intuition, a gut feeling, a personal alarm, or a premonition. It really doesn’t matter how it is articulated, what matters is that it is validated.

I like to think of instinct as the “Spidy-sense” that the superhero Spiderman had. In fact, that is how I explain it to my kids. Do you remember Peter Parker? Of course, he *is* Spiderman, and along with his super strength, speed and grip, he had a keen ability to sense danger. It was a persistent itching at the base of his skull that would

tell him that danger was nearby. This sense was so powerful that he could zone in on the source of danger with the accuracy of radar. It worked for all types of danger, not just those that were potentially life-threatening. It did not have an on/off switch, and it was not learned. It just was—and he trusted it 100 percent of the time.

I know that Spiderman was just a comic book superhero, and his powers are extreme and fictional, but they are not as different from your child's as you may think.

Instinct is innate, meaning that you are born with it. It is not learned, and you can't forget it. However, you can certainly suppress, ignore, and refuse to listen to it. Many people do, and often end up saying after it is too late, "I knew something felt wrong..."

But how can a feeling keep you—and your kids—safe? Here's how. Think of your "instinct" as several different types of alarms. These alarms are triggered by situations and feelings. Each alarm demands a different and appropriate response. Let me give you some examples.

## **Alarm clock equals your Routine Response**

Every night, most of us set our alarm clocks before we go to bed. We trust that it will sound and wake us up when we need to get up. Your responses to this alarm are routine, and don't take much effort. The mere sound of the alarm triggers you to act a certain way. If you are like me, that includes dragging yourself out of bed and heading directly for the coffee! Your alarm clock triggered your routine response.

## Car alarm equals your Ignore Response

You park your car at the mall, and as you are walking away you hear an alarm coming from the area of your car. You glance over to be sure it is not yours, but once you realize it isn't, and that there doesn't seem to be anyone breaking into another car, you determine that it doesn't affect you. So you move on without giving it much more attention. This alarm caused you to momentarily pay closer attention to the situation, but after a quick assessment, you realized that you did not need to do anything about it. This alarm triggered your ignore response.

## Fire alarm equals your Action Response

You have taken your kids to a movie and the theatre is packed. Just before the movie starts, the fire alarm sounds. You notice a strong odor of smoke. You realize that there is likely a fire and take control of the situation, gather your family, and quickly exit the building. It was obvious to you, based on the sound of the fire alarm, and the additional smell of smoke, that there was a fire. You needed to take action to stay safe and protect your family. These indicators caused you to react immediately and triggered your action response.

Each of these alarms caused you to react differently, either out of routine, annoyance, or emergency. The mere presence of them told you what to do. There was no need to question what they meant. Your responses were based on past experiences and training over the years. The alarm itself was merely a trigger for an appropriate and *learned* safe response. You didn't hear the fire alarm, smell the smoke and then say "I have no idea what that is but it sure is annoying. I am just going to ignore it." Instead, you responded appropriately based on a trigger—*the alarm*.

*If instinct is your child's personal alarm, then his feelings are its trigger.*

When “bad” feelings are present his personal alarm will sound, triggering him to respond safely.

In order for your kids to trust and rely on their instincts to keep them safe you need to do two things: validate their instincts; and role-play safe and appropriate responses to their feelings.



# Validate their instincts

If your children do not trust their instincts, and are not listening to their feelings, they will be vulnerable and at risk. Do not allow feelings like embarrassment, fear and lack of confidence turn an action response into an ignore response. Adults do it all the time, and what's worse is that, without even knowing it, they often teach kids to do the same. This can be potentially disastrous and leave your child unprotected. However, you can ensure this does not happen by validating their instincts from the time they are infants.

Here is a great example of how easy it is to dismiss your child's feelings when they are triggered by their personal alarms and instincts.

As a new parent, you want to show off your beautiful baby to the world. After all, she is so amazing and it is hard to believe that you created such a perfect little girl! People are always asking to hold her and, being the proud parent, you are happy to oblige.

However, not all babies love to be held by everyone who asks. Simply being placed in an unknown person's arms may cause them to squirm, scream, wail, and whatever else is necessary to convince you that they are feeling uncomfortable.

Now, here is the part that even I have been guilty of. You place your new bundle of joy into someone's arms and she completely freaks out. It is obvious that she is not comfortable. Instead of validating her feelings and responses, you feel embarrassed and you politely try to explain that she was just a bit fussy. You may even tell the person holding her to walk with her, or give her a soother—anything to stop the crying.

Pretty soon, you give up and take your screaming bundle of joy back into your arms and she abruptly stops crying. Had she screamed because she didn't like the person, did she sense something was



wrong, or was she just trying to make you understand what she needed? Maybe she was just wanted to feel safe, and needed you to respond to her feelings. It doesn't mean that the person who was holding her is dangerous—it simply means that your child did not want to be with them.

Babies have not developed sophisticated responses to their feelings, nor have they learned to ignore their personal alarms. In fact, a baby's instincts are as pure and in tune as they can possibly be. Your child has fully developed instincts from the moment they are born. They may not be able to tell you in words how they feel but they will alert you to the fact that they are "feeling" something.

You listen to your baby's cries for food, sleep, or a clean diaper; now just expand your understanding of what makes her uncomfortable to include people. Don't worry if your children are no longer infants; it is not too late. Start immediately. Resist the temptation to dismiss your child's feelings by explaining that they may just be tired, being silly or any other reason for not immediately validating their feelings. By dismissing or minimizing children's intuitive communication, you will only teach them to dismiss their feelings later in life. And it is later in life, when you are not by their side, that they will need it most.

## **Role-play safe and appropriate responses to their feelings**

You don't need to experience something to know how to respond safely to it. As the saying goes, "You don't need to hit me with a stick to know it hurts!" It is absurd to think that children need to

be victimized to learn how to react safely. Role-play and practice scenarios will teach them how to avoid dangerous situations.

Children often practice fire drills at school. This is done for a reason. Routine practice plays a significant role in the successful outcome of an actual emergency. If people have rehearsed safe responses to a trigger (alarm) they will likely revert to them automatically when they need to. In a dangerous situation, there is seldom time to think: you must simply react. The chances of your child reacting safely are far greater if they trust their instincts *and* have been taught how to respond.

Here's how to conduct a role-playing exercise.

Think of a situation that you feel could be potentially dangerous for your child. Describe the situation to your child in detail, making it realistic but not threatening or scary. You do not need to use scare tactics to teach your child to stay safe.

Ask them to identify a feeling they might have in that situation, and then to identify what is causing the feeling. Ask them what they think would be a safe response to the situation and feeling, and discuss their answers.

Ask them what they would want the outcome to be. Discuss the scenario until there is a positive and successful outcome. Review the situation, feeling, and response. Don't be afraid to offer them suggestions. An exercise is not a test, but it will give you some valuable insight as to how your child responds to certain situations. Don't be alarmed if they have nothing to say. Remember, they may not have experienced such a situation yet, and naturally will have nothing to draw from. This is the whole reason for the role-play—now they do!

# You Have the Power

Here it is, plain, simple, and to the point.

*You have more control over your child's safety than you may feel.*

Often it is those around you that make you feel vulnerable and powerless when it comes to your child and their safety. Conflicting advice, media hype, and mixed messages all contribute to your questioning of your abilities, and your fear of the outside world. You need to be confident that you have the power to protect your child right now, and give them the skills they need to continue to make safe choices throughout their lives.

I am going to share something with you that will help you make the right choice any time you are faced with a decision about your child's safety.

**Violence is predictable.** Common sense tells us that if something can be predicted, we can prepare for it, and ultimately prevent it from happening. *But you have to open your eyes to see it coming—and then take control of the situation.* Crossing your fingers, following old tactics, and hoping for the best is not the answer.

Control means that you, the parent, choose the degree of risk in a given situation. The higher the risk taken, the greater and more severe the consequences could be. Children are not yet capable of making decisions related to risks. That is your job. Your choices will determine how safe your children will be when they are young, and will teach them safe responses as they grow older and more independent.

For example, if you choose to leave your baby in your car while you quickly run into the corner store, you are obviously increasing the risk of your child becoming distressed, overheated or, worst of all, abducted. You are in control of the situation, but your choices have actually increased the risk of danger.

If you choose to take your baby with you, even though it is difficult and time-consuming, you have also controlled the situation, but you have decreased the risk of danger. You had complete control at all times. The choice about how much risk you were willing to take was yours.

It is important to note, however, that although by making a safe choice you have reduced the risk, you can not and will not be able to remove them entirely.

Risk is part of everything we do. There is a risk that you will burn your cake if you do not time it properly; there is a risk that you will not feel well tomorrow if you stay out late tonight; there is a risk that your children will become injured if you do not supervise them; there is a risk to your family's safety if you do not protect them.

You only have control over your own behavior and surroundings. Period. You cannot control what someone else may do, or how other parents safeguard their children. You can't control when a predator decides to strike, but you can control the access they have to your kids.

*Parents are faced with constant and simultaneous choices from the moment that their child is born.*

Some choices are more obvious, such as not leaving your child unattended in a car, and others are cleverly disguised.

Tracy, a friend of mine, has a lovely daughter named Chelsea, who is in grade one. This little girl is very sociable, outgoing and quite a character. Her mom is cautious, sets boundaries, sticks to punishments, and enforces rules. She is conscientious but not paranoid. She is like the majority of parents I meet, and her story is also hauntingly common.

Tracy runs a hair salon out of her home. She is usually very busy with work, home life, social engagements, and planning her children's activities.

Tracy has an arrangement with a neighbor, who also has a child in grade one, to pick up Chelsea after school. This way, Tracy can fit in a few more clients before the end of the day.

One very hectic day in the salon, Tracy received a phone call from her neighbor around the time that school was being dismissed. The neighbor told Tracy that Chelsea had been invited to go over to the house of another child in her class and she desperately wanted to go.

Instinctively Tracy said no. She did not know the mother of the other child, and did not feel that Chelsea should go. But that answer was not very popular with Chelsea. She began to scream and cry and beg her mom to let her go to the other girl's home.

Tracy stood her ground in a heated discussion with her six-year-old, all the while juggling the phone, a pair of scissors, and waiting customers.

She told Chelsea that she did not know the other mommy, did not know where she lived and that they would have to arrange for another time to visit and play. But Chelsea was having no part of reason. She simply wanted to go.

As the argument ensued, Tracy became increasingly angry and frustrated. Finally, the other girl's mother took the phone from Chelsea and spoke to Tracy. It was obvious that this woman was

very offended at Tracy's reaction and began to argue and state that she was a good mother and would obviously take care of Chelsea. Of course, all this was done while Chelsea listened in.

Tracy began to give in to the stress, confusion, and bullying from both her daughter and the woman (whom she still didn't know). Against her better judgment, she finally agreed to allow Chelsea to go to the woman's home but requested that the woman call her as soon as she arrived home. Tracy intended to pick up Chelsea soon after.

The woman agreed and hung up. Tracy was upset by the confrontation with her daughter and the woman, but mostly because she gave in to them. She realized that in her confusion she had neglected to ask for the woman's phone number, or to find out where she lived.

With no idea where Chelsea was going, Tracy could only hope that the woman would call her soon. Over an hour passed, and still there was no phone call.

Tracy began to panic. She called around to other parents and eventually found the name and address of the woman who had taken Chelsea to her home. She lived close to one of Tracy's good friends.

Tracy still had clients in her salon and felt that she could not get away, so she called her friend and asked her to go and pick up Chelsea. When the friend arrived, Chelsea was playing happily with her new friend. The mother easily let this stranger, who was obviously not Chelsea's mother, take Chelsea away. The woman never did call Tracy.

Fortunately this story did not have a tragic outcome. Tracy and Chelsea were very lucky. And while it's easy to point fingers at any one of these individuals and place blame, it is more important to identify the turning points—and there were many—and the factors

that influenced Tracy's decisions.

As a parent reading this story, you may recall being in a similar situation in which your instincts told you to do one thing but time, convenience, fear of confrontation or embarrassment compelled you to do another. Let's look at how those factors can lead to unsafe choices, and how you can overcome them.

You, as a parent, have control over your child's safety. You always have. And your children, contrary to media hype, are not sitting ducks. That's the good news.

The bad news is that parents often make decisions that can affect the safety of their children for ill-conceived and frivolous reasons.

Most parents, not unlike Tracy, will look for reasons to justify their decisions to go against their instincts. Many believe that a feeling is not enough, that they should have proof of someone or something being potentially dangerous. But each situation will give you advance warning signals that are crystal clear, signals that are all the proof you need to follow your instincts and make the safe choice. You have to be willing to look for and see them, and not allow other factors to interfere and make the decision for you.

*Unsafe choices are usually based on poor excuses:*

Excuse one:	Embarrassment
Excuse two:	Avoidance
Excuse three:	Ignorance
Excuse four:	Convenience

## Embarrassment

Parents are often concerned about how they appear to other parents, teachers, their boss, or even their kids. Many will do almost anything to avoid an embarrassing situation. To make decisions without being influenced by embarrassment, force yourself to look at the embarrassing moment as just that—a moment that will pass. Don't allow the moment to be the turning point where good goes to bad.

## Avoidance

Sometimes it seems easiest to just agree to do something to avoid confrontation. After all, some people can be so insistent! A clear warning sign that someone is trying to control you is when they won't take "no" for an answer. Every parent knows how difficult it can be to stick to your "no," especially when your kids want something. But the bottom line is that if you are around, you make the decisions about your children's safety, *not them*. I know it is hard and kids can be demanding, but stick to your "no" and move on. You can avoid danger if you learn *not* to avoid confrontation.

## Ignorance

Not my favorite word, but ignorance is the best word to describe the "nothing bad could ever happen to us" attitude. Anything can happen. It is your job as a parent to control the risk associated with every situation your child faces. You need to invest the time to learn the hazards, weigh the risks, and go into each day with a clear and realistic view of your child's risks. Believing that one is invincible is reserved for the teenagers of the world, not parents.

## Convenience

Let's face it. Once you have a baby, convenience, ease, and speed of movement are out the nursery door! I am a working mom, and I have been for both my sons' lives. I understand the stress of work life, married life and parenthood. I get it. But I also know how to fight it.



Convenience is one of the most common reasons for making unsafe choices. “I’m late for dinner so I’ll just take the short cut,” we tell ourselves. Or “The baby is asleep in the car seat. I’ll just zip into the store without him and lock the car doors. It will only take a minute.” We have all felt the lure of raising the risk, out of convenience. In fact, we are all likely guilty of at least one offense.

It can take only seconds for good to go bad. Don’t let the song fool you: time is not always on your side.

In a seminar with a group of parents, I used the story of Tracy and Chelsea to illustrate the difference between reasons and excuses. Below is a list of how the parents in the seminar saw the situation, and the factors that influenced Tracy’s decision to let Chelsea go to the friend’s house. See if you can identify the reasons and the excuses.

- Tracy was busy and distracted with the clients and could not think straight.
- Chelsea was yelling at her and would not take no for an answer.
- The woman had a daughter who was also in Chelsea’s class. For that reason she could be trusted.
- Tracy felt bad for making the woman think that she was judging her to be a bad parent.
- It was easier to let Chelsea go and pick her up quickly, than to continue with the battle.
- Tracy was angry at the scene Chelsea was making and felt embarrassed for her neighbor, who was doing her a favor in the first place.
- Tracy trusted the woman would call her.

I asked the parents if Tracy had any control over each decision she’d made. The answers were clearly yes. However, she made choices based on excuses rather than safe reasons.

When you make a decision that involves the safety of your child,

you need to test your reasoning. Is your decision being made to reduce risk—or is it an excuse? Excuses give you permission to go against your instincts, but they will enhance rather than eliminate the risk.

## Facing the Risks

The world is different than when we were kids. New threats such as the Internet have made predators more mobile and anonymous than in the past. Meanwhile, the increased number of latchkey kids, the growing gang and drug violence that infiltrate suburbs, and a weakening criminal justice system give parents plenty of reasons to be concerned.

But in your quest for your children’s safety, a quest that requires unremitting effort and diligence, you are not alone. And you do not have to send your kids into the world without protection. There may not be a science to keeping kids safe, but there are basic principles and skills you can learn that will guide you in any situation. If you can look at the dangers head-on, recognize the warning signs, and make safe choices, you will have safe kids and a safe family.

## *Seven Ways to Achieve the Ultimate Safe Family*

When I became a parent, I was not yet a cop. When I became a cop, I was not yet a child safety advocate—or so I thought. When I became a child safety advocate, I realized that I had been one all along.

I became one from the moment I held my first-born son in my arms.

There are no words to describe the feelings and emotions I felt then. I can only attempt to explain that it was like a burst of sudden pride, amazement, confusion, fear and unconditional love completely and utterly engulfed me.

In the beginning, I chose a parenting style that many of my friends would describe as “over-the-top protective.” I felt such an overwhelming need to protect my son that I would rarely let others (even family) hold him, for fear they would drop him. I spent hours watching him in amazement. I could hear his softest cries, long before anyone else could. I could predict when he was going to be fussy, upset or uncomfortable. If he cried, I ran to his side.

I wanted so much for my son to be safe, and I had to be sure I was doing everything I could to ensure it. So I began to learn about my community, the risks my son might face one day, and what I could do to protect him. And I read a lot. But, seventeen years ago, most books on parenting were rather boring, and often less than practical: they did not address child safety beyond advising parents to cover their electrical outlets and keep things out of baby’s reach. I attended seminars and watched every television program about kids and safety I could find, though they were few and far between.

I was fascinated with personal safety and the power of proactive, preventive approaches. It didn’t take long before I knew that what I needed to be was—a cop.

As a parent, I looked inward at my family and children and concentrated on their safety alone. As a police officer, I chose to extend my concern for the safety of all people and children within my community. I had many roles to play. I was a teacher, advisor, listener, mediator, counselor, and referee. I learned, through the experiences and tragedies of others, that there is a lot more we can do to protect our children. Too often, I heard heartbreaking comments from parents like these:

*How could this happen? I knew him well, or at least I thought I did. He seemed like such a nice guy...*

*My child is very smart, and I have gone over the rules with him so many times. He knows not to talk to strangers. But he is so friendly. I told him not to be. He didn't listen. Why didn't he listen?*

*I know his friends—well, most of them. I know his teacher. He has been going to that school since he was in kindergarten. Why weren't they watching him?*

*I keep the computer in the living room so I can see my daughter when she is online. I don't understand all the stuff that she does on it, but she told me not to worry so much. I had no idea...How could I have?*

*She said she was just going over to a friend's house. That was three days ago. I didn't ask who her friend was. I didn't think it was any of my business. After all, she is seventeen.*

*She seemed like such a great lady. She had two kids of her own. The house was clean, and she was so nice. She even gave me references. I don't understand how she could have done this to my child.*

Seeing and hearing so much confusion over how to be a *safe family*, I realized that what parents needed was clear direction, and a positive, proactive focus on child safety.

**Safe families are empowered by knowledge, not disabled by fear.** They do not choose to ignore or deny potential danger; instead, they learn everything they can about it. Knowledge is empowering. The more you know about how something happened, what went wrong, and how it could have been prevented, the better prepared you will be.

As a police officer and a child safety expert, I have met many parents

who live in constant fear for the safety of their kids, fear that affects every decision they make. They are consumed with the horror they see daily in the media, and are driven to protect their kids at any cost. I applaud their devotion. However, too much fear can often disguise the warning signs of dangerous people and situations, and actually cause you to make unsafe choices. *If you allow yourself to become consumed with fear you will not be able to protect your kids.*

*The only thing you need to fear is what you do not understand.*

If you can see the dangers, and understand the threats that your kids face, you can prepare for them. If you don't look at them, they will sneak up behind you, and you will be left with the reactive response, which you might say is like crossing your fingers and hoping for the best.

Let's face it, there are terrible tragedies reported every day in the media, some with details that I truly believe only the police and other professionals need to know. The safe parent has to learn about these dangers, but they won't focus on the gruesome details. They'll gain insight by finding the point in the story where a *choice* changed the course of events.

A safe parent is able to predict when good will go bad as easily as knowing when their child is in need. Being able to predict when good will go bad is about "tickling" your natural ability to recognize the warning signals sent by people, places, and things. A safe parent is someone who is able to separate perceived danger from the real thing, someone who is able to predict danger and prevent tragedy. That parent is you.

# Rules for Safe Parents to Live By

- 1. Listen to your instincts. Question everything.** You have a natural ability to sense danger. If your instinct is telling you there is danger, there is—period.
- 2. Anticipate worst-case scenarios through role-plays.** Prepare for the unexpected. *“You don’t need to hit me with a stick to know it hurts.”* Well, you also don’t need to personally experience events to learn how to react to them. Role play potential real dangers, making sure your scenarios are realistic. Know the difference between real and perceived danger.
- 3. Lead with your eyes and mind.** Look ahead and beyond what is in front of you. Know your surroundings before you pass them. Think about clues that are presented to you and try to understand their meanings.
- 4. Don’t jump recklessly into unsafe situations.** Cops don’t jump recklessly into unsafe situations, and neither should you. Although television shows like to make you believe that cops act on the spur of the moment, they simply don’t. That would be stupid, dangerous, and even deadly. Each person, place, and event is assessed—yes, sometimes at lightning speed—for its threat level and risk factor.

Surveillance, assessment, and planning are what make it possible for cops to return to their families at the end of the day—not complacency, recklessness, or fearlessness.

Although I am certain that you, a parent, would throw yourself into danger to protect your children, you don’t need to. You just have to recognize when it’s a good time to run in the other direction.

5. **Always call for help.** You are never alone. More people will help you than hurt you—believe that. Don't be afraid to call for help—you are not bothering anyone. Recognize your limitations. Don't go into a dangerous place or situation alone.
6. **Resist complacency.** Complacency is the number-one reason for victimization. Don't wait until tomorrow to fix the locks on your doors, and never believe that it can't happen to you. Anything is possible—and everyone is equal when it comes to dangers.
7. **Get involved.** It takes a community to keep kids safe. Learn about what dangers are specific to your community. Attend town meetings, express your opinions, and speak up for kids and their safety. Most of all, get over any unwillingness you may have about reporting a crime to the police. Do it anonymously if you like, but always—always—report any suspicious activity or people to the police. Simply by being a member of your community, you are already involved, and the information you give—no matter how insignificant it may seem—could be a turning point in an investigation and ultimately save a life or result in getting a creep off the streets your children are playing in.

Most criminals are caught because the police received tips from people just like you. The police can't be everywhere and they need your help. Consider the success of at least over 1100 criminal captures resulting from the popularity of the TV show *America's Most Wanted*. These captures happened because people got involved.

Because I have been a police officer, I look at people, situations, and events a little differently than most people might. I look beyond the crime itself and into the events and situations that led up to it. I look at their future implications rather than focus on their present.

There is still a large part of me that thinks and reacts like a cop even though it has been four years since I left policing to devote all my time to more proactive methods of child protection. I guess it will always be that way, and to me it feels like a gift rather than a burden. But you don't need to be a cop, or to encounter the same experiences that I did, to keep your kids safe. There are always warning signs. You just need to know what to look for, be willing to accept the truth of your own instincts, and have the courage to act on what you know.

Understand that you have the ability to protect your kids. Be confident in that. Safe kids have safe families. It *is* that simple—because crimes can be prevented, violence is predictable, and knowledge is the key. .





# Thank You!

I can't thank you enough for your continued support of my blog, Kidproof, and everything that I do. I truly believe that there are few things in this world that have the ability to transcend borders, race, religion, socioeconomic status, age and gender as completely as the fundamental need to protect a child.

As a mom, keeping kids safe is as important to me, as it is to you. So wherever in the world you call home, and raise your children, I wish you a happy, healthy and safe life.

Please leave a comment at <http://www.samanthawilson.com> , or if you'd rather reach me in private, don't hesitate to send me an email at [sam@samanthawilson.com](mailto:sam@samanthawilson.com). I read each and every single comment and email, so don't be shy!

Lastly, if you haven't already, you can follow me on Twitter (@samanthawilson\_ don't forget the underscore), and join in on the conversations going on right now on my Facebook Fan Page You can even join the Kidproof Community at <http://community.kidproofsafety.com/>

Thanks again!  
Samantha Wilson