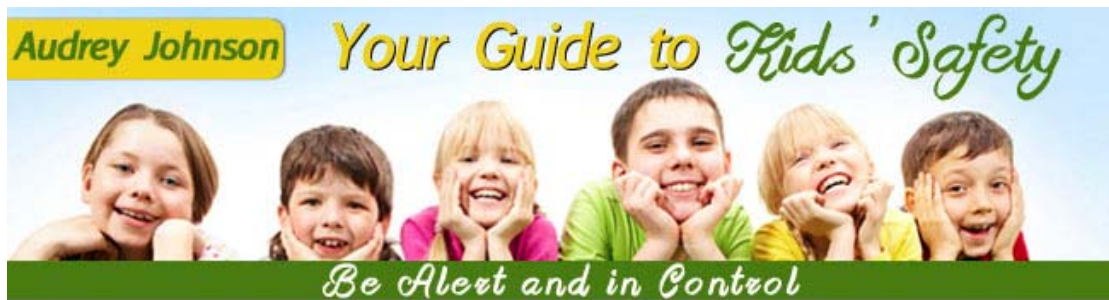


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## About the Author

Audrey Johnson grew up on a farm where there were plenty of risks for young carefree kids.

She said, "We got a lot of scraped knees and that sort of thing but we got through okay."

"But, the kids today have many more risks to deal with and their parents can be overwhelmed helping them cope and stay confident and safe."

Audrey said, "Most of the focus is on the perils and temptations of the Internet. We need to be aware of them and help our kids understand the dangers."

"But, it's not just the Internet that has risks! There are other dangers which don't get as much attention which can be just as devastating for everyone concerned."

"It's too late to turn back the tide and trying to isolate our children from it is plainly impossible."

"Every parent and carer needs to learn the truth about the problems and how to protect the kids and all members of the family from them."

"I want to help readers to filter out the bad advice, keep up with the best information and use it to keep their kids aware and safe even when they're not together."

"There's no way that the government, teachers or law enforcement can handle this without all the rest of us doing what we can."

"I hope my book will give you some tips and strategies which will help you help your kids reach their goals".

## Introduction



Most of us are aware of the dangers which lurk in the exciting world-wide Internet.

Some of those problems have become even more prevalent due to the power of phones and other devices which caused the explosion of social media.

Even many very young children have their own devices or ready access to those belonging to their parents.

A lot of attention is being given to the damage caused to families because of this.

I will give you some information about protecting your kids and yourself against those problems.

But, I will also help you to protect your kids better against the other risks they face, including bullying, violence and the worst kinds of peer pressure.

These problems have always been around and some of us had our own problems with some of them when we were kids as well.

But, the faster pace of many people's lives and the pressure of higher density living has made their effects much worse.

Many children are hurt or even worse because they cannot cope with these problems.

Often, their parents are unaware to some extent of the serious nature of those problems.

I will try to help you keep connected with your kids, ready and able to help them whenever they face something.

I don't claim to know it all. But, I've asked the right people the questions you need answers to and put their answers here to help you and your

families.

*Audrey Johnson*

## **Kids in the Digital Age**

Your kids are at risk every day probably more than we were because of the accelerated pace of our lives and the rapidly growing range of temptations pushed to them from the Internet and in other ways.

All parents have to realize their kids, despite everything they've been told, may be exposed to many things which you would be unlikely to allow in your home. They will see them at friends' places or other locations they go.

If they have their own computer or access to one shared with other family members, the whole world is probably open to them. They can get through or around most security systems to access something they've been told will be great fun. I'll leave you to think about what that might be!

Among the many wonderful aspects of this age, there are more risks than ever and the power of those who seek to use and abuse our children for profit or other purposes is almost unlimited.

I've covered many of these threats in this book as well as many others which are part of our daily lives but, new threats and schemes are being tried all the time.

Hopefully, the advice which I share here will give you some better understanding of the problems and the resources which are being developed to help you Keep Your Kids Safer.

## Pets and Other Animals



Safety around animals is an important subject for all parents, their children and also the animals.

Preventing harm to our children is most important.

We also need to be aware that many animals, including loved pets, are hurt or worse through the

actions of children as well.

No child should be left alone with any animal unless they are experienced in handling it safely and know how to avoid any danger to themselves.

Children need to be supervised and not allowed to handle any animal unless they know how to do it safely for them and the animal.

Small animals are often injured by children squeezing, bending or dropping them. Often, they must be euthanized as other treatment is either unavailable or too costly for the family to pay.

That can be very traumatic for all concerned.

Many people lift pets by holding them around the chest, leaving the back stomach and back legs unsupported which can cause severe injuries.

Always put your other hand under the animal's back legs.

It's better for the parent to handle the animal and just let the child pat the pet. This gives both the animal and the child more protection.

That would also reduce the number of animals which are put down after causing injury to someone, often a child, whose actions may have caused them to bite.

Experienced trainers and breeders usually have some idea of what a dog or other animal is likely to do.

But, they would warn that different breeds will have different dominant traits and that not all of any particular breed will react the same way. Any animal may react "out of character" if they are in an unfamiliar or stressful



situation.

And, the effect of widely different lives which the animals may have had and you understand that no guide can cover all situations equally well.

A good rapport with any type of animal can only come with experience, either their own or from someone else.

The advice I got from an experienced dog handler which you might share with your children was:

Don't touch any dog which does not know and trust you.

Don't keep looking directly at a dog you don't know. It may think you are getting ready to attack. People appreciate someone looking directly at their eyes but many animals think that could be a sign of imminent attack.

Don't touch an animal when it is feeding and don't touch that food either.

If you are frightened, the dog will sense it and feel more wary as well.

Don't brush an animal's fur the wrong way.

Never rub your hand from behind its forehead down over toward its nose. Their natural reaction is to bite because it doesn't know what you may have in that hand.

If you find an injured dog, cover them with something to keep them warm and call a vet. Don't pick them up as you may make their injuries worse.

## Safety in Stores and Malls

We all enjoy shopping and large stores and malls work hard to entice us in.

You need to take extra care with your children because of the many bright, shiny temptations and hordes of people in there with you.

You won't be able to maintain a clear personal space but telling your children about that before will help them to be aware of who is in that area near them.

Keep them close and insist they don't go away from you without your permission.

Give each small child a laminated card with your contact details. If they have any medical conditions, make sure that information is on the card.

These cards can be made at home on your computer or at any office supplies store.

You should also carry small spare photos of your kids to give the store staff if one does get lost. That makes identification and relaying descriptions real quick and easy!

Tell them if they are separated and get scared, it's okay to yell once to try to tell you.

Tell them not to go with any one that approaches them, but to go into the nearest store and speak to someone behind the first counter they see. Show them how most store employees and security have lapel pins or badges. Then, they should not move anywhere else until you arrive.

If you are separated, you should do the same. Each mall and major store has tested routines for these situations. Some can lock down a whole center quickly.

Older children can be relied on to recognize police and store security, so there are less concerns there. Make sure they will meet you at a pre-arranged time if you are driving them home or to some other place.

Also, it's a good idea to insist that they don't leave the site without making sure that they tell you first. That way, you should be aware of the

people they are going with.

There are some other hazards in stores which few of us take notice of. Stores display items of all types on various stands. Sometimes, these displays can fall if someone, even a small child, pulls on part of it. Make sure they know they must not touch anything like that.

Kids also like to explore in and under constructions.

This is also a problem in supermarkets where they stack cans and even bottles in the aisles!

## Accidents Do Happen

Children often seem indestructible as they run around and jump over things every day.

But, we always need to keep alert and minimize the very real risks.

Here are some things which you may not consider dangerous ... until now!

**Shopping Carts:** Some parents love the convenience of shopping carts, but many children are seriously hurt in them every year. They are not well-balanced for carrying lively children. Some parents let the children “help” to push the cart or ride somewhere other than the seat which is provided. These actions are likely to cause injuries when the child falls or has the loaded cart fall on them.



Keep the child buckled in the cart’s seat where there is a seat-belt and stay within easy reach all the time the child is in the cart.

Carts which have the child lower down may be more stable but always check for problems with any cart before entrusting your child to it.

**Elevators:** These are the preferred way for parents with strollers to go between floors, instead of escalators.

But, there are risks with them too.

Most are safe enough for most circumstances, but the makers cannot prevent some unusual challenges causing problems and injuries.

If you get in or out of an elevator and then remember you left something, even a child behind, don’t try to block the doors from closing with your foot, bag, stroller or anything else.

The doors are high-powered and most things will be crushed unless their electric sensors “see” the item and stop in time.

Never take that chance!

Don’t let your child stay near the doors or try to grab them when they are moving. The sensors may not see their arm and many children suffer

serious harm this way.

Don't rush onto an elevator without checking that its floor is the same level as the floor you are standing on. They sometimes stop slightly or even a large margin out of alignment.

Be aware there sometimes is a gap between the edge of the floor and the elevator. Children may catch their shoes or other gear in that gap unless they check first.

**Escalators:** Thousands of children are hurt when using escalators despite the best efforts of stores and their parents to keep them safe.

Even if they're getting to the age where they don't like holding your hand, this is one situation where it's wise too insist they do until they have some experience and confidence.

***Check where the escalator's emergency stop button is.*** If there is an incident hit the button or yell for someone to do that if you are too far away.

If you have a stroller, use the enclosed elevator instead. It is very easy to become unbalanced or have someone knock you while there are only two wheels on one of the elevator's steps. If there's no elevator, someone might help you carry the stroller up the escalator if you ask them.

Before they get on, check your children's shoelaces are tied and there's no bits of clothing or other things which could be caught in the machinery.

Watch how they step on as this is where many kids catch their fingers in the handrail.

Make them stand upright, looking ahead. Sitting is dangerous because it puts them and the edges of their clothing near the internal moving parts of the system. Some kids are seriously injured this way every month!

If they frighten easily, you might want to keep talking with them through the ride. Some can get upset if they focus on the moving stairs or the floor below them.

**Balloons:** Almost everyone loves latex balloons, but they can be a serious hazard for children and pets.

If a balloon breaks, the pieces fly with considerable speed. Any piece can

hit and damage an eye or, much worse, lodge in the child's throat. That can be fatal even if medical help is immediately available. The soft, damp rubber sticks to the throat and is very hard to successfully remove. About 100 such tragedies have been recorded in 40 years. The number of children suffering non-fatal injuries would be far higher.

The number may seem small but losing three loved children like this every year is too many.

This risk was first publicized by balloon manufacturers in a bid to get warnings on all bags of balloons, including imported ones. They recommend that anyone blowing up balloons use a pump or wear eye protection.

It is very important to clear up and dispose of any pieces of rubber when a balloon breaks so no children or pets are tempted to play with them.

Children should not be allowed to blow up balloons except when they use a pump. The effort required is probably a strain on their lungs and chest.

Letting pets play with balloons is even more risky because their sharp teeth and claws make an accident more likely.

Some doctors want laws that require everyone to use pumps to minimize the possible spread of influenza and other germs from the blowers' mouths. The risk is small and it is unlikely that such a law will happen in the near future.

But, the warning is worth keeping in mind, at least when there are flu germs and pneumonia is becoming a scourge because of drug resistance.

## Don't Panic

I have to tell many unsavory facts in this book. This section is about one of most parent's greatest fears – abduction or abuse of their children.



Parents and their kids are being challenged and the enemies are very powerful.

But, don't panic.

The level of risk of abduction is fairly low. Of course, that does not make it okay to reduce your level of awareness and pro-active security.

The effects on each child and their family is almost too horrible to think about.

But, wrapping your family in cotton wool and barbed wire won't make them feel safer or do anything for their self-confidence!

And, it won't prevent them being at risk.

They will be away from your home and your control sometimes.

Worrying won't help.

This book will show you that you can protect your children and become more aware of the risks which are popping up. It gets you started by answering some questions and suggesting strategies which will help you recognize new threats in the future as well.

I have included information about risks in our streets and even our homes.

These have increased at a slower rate than the Internet problems but they are also potential areas of concern.

But, there has been a great increase in the awareness of the risks and more action is being taken.

The trend for parents to make serious efforts to be aware and involved with their kids' activities have made a lot of parent-child relationships closer.

One reported benefit is that many children have more attention from both parents and this generally improves their self-confidence.



## Do You Really Know Your Neighbors?

In many communities, we have lost the sense of neighborhood which helped make our homes and streets safer. Many people never share more than a few words with their closest neighbors, some people even die and lay undiscovered in their suburban homes for weeks while their neighbors pass their homes every day.

One thing which will help provide better security for everyone is to learn who lives in your street.



When a child went missing from my grandmother's street years ago, there were people looking and spreading the word in minutes.

They didn't need photos because their children played together and most knew the children living near them by sight even if they weren't friends.

The girl was found safe in a couple of hours.

Even back then, there wasn't always a happy ending but that neighborhood identity certainly helped everyone.

My grandmother used to let her cat sit on their front fence and all the local kids would pat it as they walked past on their way to school.

But, I would not dare let our current cat sit on such an exposed spot every day. And, in many places, it's not even that safe to let kids walk to school either!

## Be Aware

This section gives you some information about recent developments, good and bad, in protecting children.

### *Sex Offenders Registers*

One of the breakthroughs in recent years has been the establishment in some areas of registers of sexual offenders.

The usual requirement is that people convicted of sexual offences are required to have their personal details, including name, address and a current photograph recorded on the state register.

They are also required to notify the registrar of any change in address, name or other significant details for the period specified by the judge or the state's legislation

This allows people to know about convicted offenders who move into their area. But, the reality is that they are not working as well as it was hoped.

They are not always up-to-date.

There are claims they are unfair to the people listed.

The number of convicted offenders who are not listed is high because of low funding available for checking.

But, the registers may have some good effect over time if they are more widely adopted and we push our legislators to provide proper support so all offenders have to register or face more penalties.

## Beating the Bullies

Bullying has been a major problem for any children through the centuries.

It has grown to be a major problem with the new social media.

But, it has been a part of life at schools, military establishments and many other organizations before then.

Children may not tell you about cyber or even face-to-face bullying which they are subjected to.

But, these topics are so important, because the effects can be damaging to the targeted child's ability to integrate and socialize with other people for years into the future.

Some that feel particularly isolated and distressed may even take their own lives.

Why does this happen? Well, nowadays the bullies can do much of their attacks anonymously if they want and they know the kids they pick on well enough to believe there is little risk of being reported.

Those children are usually lacking in self-confidence and respond negatively to their situation.



If nobody texts them in a friendly way, they feel isolated and somehow inferior. Or, they may be the only person in their class not invited to a party by a classmate.

You may want to approach the subject in a general way and try to get your

child look at more possibilities.

Ask them if they are aware how easily someone can change their identity when they are online?

In that situation, how do they decide if someone really is who they say they are?

Do they believe something more if they hear or read it online?

Scams and traps are rampant across the Internet.

Some reputable sites have been imitated by others who use the fake web sites to get information for fraud, identity theft and other crimes.

This can lead to a discussion about sexting and posting personal information and pictures online.

It's a form of instant gratification but the after-taste can be very bitter and last for years.

What might be some of the long-term consequences of that information being on the Internet where nothing ever really goes away?

If they want examples, point them to the Wayback Machine ([web.archive.org/](http://web.archive.org/)) where copies of web sites are stored. Google has been collecting web pages without anyone minding. But, they probably have a lot of pages the creators wish had been lost forever!

Imagine what might happen if some nasty comments a friend of theirs made today were brought up when they were applying for a high-paying position years later.

It's common knowledge that companies and the recruitment advisors check the background of applicants on the Internet, especially on the social networks.

## **Myths about Child Abuse**

Although the words child abuse , kidnapping and exploitation cause understandable strong reactions in us, we need to keep in mind that the rate of most of these forms of abuse are still low.

So, don't panic but get yourself informed and active about those precautions which you can take to protect your children and others where appropriate.

This section will give you the truth about some widely promoted ideas which are not always right.

### **Most children that suffer sexual abuse are victimized by people that are not known to them or their immediate family.**

Most incidents involve people that know or may even be related to the victim.

One element of this is the fact that these people are most likely to have easy access to these children, often with no other people around.

### **Most offenders are easy to spot.**

Although there are many personality and other factors which are common to many offenders, there are seldom signs which are easy for us to identify.

It is very easy to make mistakes about the intentions of people, especially if their attitude or appearance is different to most people living in the area or if they exhibit any unusual behavior patterns.

### **Some children bring the problem on themselves by their behavior.**

Children may seem more knowledgeable today than in the past but they are still children, much like we and previous generations were. They don't have the personal skills or experience of older people and must not be held responsible for things which are beyond their experience or ability to judge.

### **Fathers are mostly the culprits where violence is involved.**

Men and women both frequently use violence against children.

**Children with some disability are much less likely to be abused.**

Many children with disabilities suffer abuse. Their disability seems to not reduce their chance of serious abuse. Sometimes, their actual vulnerability seems to increase the potential for abuse!

**Many children make up claims of abuse.**

This rarely happens and most children do not have the knowledge of sex interaction to maintain a lie when they are talked to by a trained counselor or investigator.

**If a child is abused, the parent or carer is at fault.**

Child abusers plan most of their assaults and become skilled at covering their tracks and their intentions. They are manipulators who know the risks they take while the people around the child may have no indication of their intentions.

Parents and carers do have responsibilities but they are not mind-readers!

## **Actions Speak Louder**

The most effective thing a parent can do is to lead by example, not just words.

You probably do your best to take an active part in your child's development and help them learn and enjoy their valuable years as a child.

We need to match our words to our actions.

We can talk to our kids about things we see other people do which are worth copying. These may be incidents in the news, or things we might see when we are going somewhere with our children, and are likely to have the most impact.

These real-life examples make a connection with children which our words may not.

When they see us giving respect to the people we meet and deal with, they are more likely to do the same.

Sometimes, we can be frustrated or tired from a hard day's work at home or the office. That's when we may cause friction and upset between family members.

Those understandable lapses can have lasting effects and reduce the effectiveness of your advice.

The good news is that our children will mostly want to please us and do what we say.

The most important point is that they are more likely to follow the example we set in what we do.

If you tell them to keep their room tidier, but have a garage full of clutter, they will try to do what you say but will feel that it probably won't work out any better than your garage has.

Punishment and reward have their place, but being a living example is the most effective way to inspire them.

## **When they start to go solo**

Many parents feel more tension about their children starting to explore their neighborhood or go to events without them than going to the dentist.

The main thing is to ensure that you have kept the communication between you friendly and with a high degree of trust.

Their first major solo experience will possibly be going to school and watching you leave them there.

Your best source of advice is the staff of their school and your friends who have recently been through this rite of passage with their kids.

Prepare yourself with information and then prepare your child by talking with them about their new adventure.

Your library will have books which you can read with your child about this type of experience.

The teachers will ensure that the new kids are mixing with everyone else soon after arriving.

They'll share activities, books and breaks.

When we bring them home, they will probably want to tell you about their day. Some may have worries which they hesitate to share. Take it slowly but ask them what they did not like as well as what they did. But, keep it light and happy if possible.

Remember that all the school staff, not just the teachers, are all ready to help if you need it.

The most important point mentioned to me by other parents and teachers alike is that we must keep calm.

Our kids feed of whatever emotional states we display, especially when there are unknown elements in the situation.

If you recognize that could be a problem for you, realizing how important it is for your child will help you keep it together.

We will get through the experience and it will have a lasting impact on us – a good one!



After a few weeks, they will be settling in and talking about their new experiences comfortably.

Only then, you will realize that you have helped your child through an important stage in their development and they have gained some essential self-confidence about their abilities, their new friends and the love we share with them.

## Helping Your Child to Cope

We all want to protect our children to the best level possible.

Part of that is preparing them to be as safe as possible when we cannot be with them.

I've mentioned teaching them when they should or should not answer the door and teaching them about their personal space.

There are other important things they need to know but we have to keep in mind what they need and what could be beyond that at each age level.

One error which some people make is that they make the outside world sound scary and dangerous.

That is true to a degree but we need to encourage our kids to embrace this world and its opportunities.

Scaring them, even to a small degree, will make them less willing to explore and, most importantly, fill their minds with distracting fear which will reduce their ability to stay safe!

Make time to walk around those areas you commonly use for shopping, entertainment and other activities.

Talk to them about what they find interesting.

Point out any possible problems, like dark alleys or areas where they could easily be assaulted or robbed.

When you drive some distance, ask them to try to remember up to six landmarks.

Let them write them down at first.

Then, tell them to just try to remember them when they've had some written practice.

Yes, you can compete with them on the return journey in announcing which of the landmarks will be seen next.

This simple game will help them to use and develop their memory.

It will also give them some incentive to remember more about the areas they go through.

This will give them better skills at finding their way around new areas.  
That is a real confidence builder as well as a useful skill.

## Explaining the Risks to Your Kids



If you are wondering whether to explain the risks we discuss here with young children, the advice I get is to discuss it when they ask about something specific in the news or from someone they know.

But, don't overload or scare them.

You can also tell them that they should not let anyone except their parents, sitter and doctor touch them in their private areas.

Many parents use juvenile terms for our sexual bits but the experts' advice is to use the real terms even with small children.

This can help if there is an incident because the child will use the terms everyone understands.

Tell them it's okay to say no if someone wants them to do something they are unwilling or afraid of doing.

Make it clear that nobody should touch them on their private parts or do anything which makes them feel bad or hurts.

They must tell their parents about it even if they promised not to.

Another important thing to tell our kids about is what to do if they are approached by someone who wants their help to find a street or a puppy or other enticing animal.

They must understand that these people should ask an adult, but to say their parents will be there soon and they won't mind being asked.

Remember always that most child abusers are known to the family and the child. If you get any feeling of concern about anyone who has access to your child without you present, even if it is a close relative, check the situation.

Many predators get into positions of trust with the aim of taking advantage of kids they associate with.

I know some businesses and private groups take their responsibilities to

check references thoroughly.

But, others take the word of the applicants and put off thorough checks until they have more time.

Many states now have some form of a police records check when anyone is applying for a job where they will be in contact with children.

If these are used in your area, make sure that the company you deal with has done its checking.

## Resources

The links and other material in this section are supplied as is with no warranty or guarantee. Sites may change ownership, purpose and content at any time. The publisher, author and distributors cannot be responsible for any occurrence, misinformation or other problem, Anyone using them in any way does so entirely at their own risk. Always keep your antivirus and anti-malware programs up to date and functioning.

### **High quality password generator**

<https://www.grc.com/passwords.htm>

A free generator of high quality random passwords. This is a quality site and Mr. Gibson has a very high reputation.

Most free password generators only provide shorter ones and do not even attempt to make them as random as these.

That means these take a little more care to use but are probably much safer for that.

From the Site: "Generating long, high-quality random passwords is not simple. So here is some totally random raw material, generated just for YOU, to start with.

"Every time this page is displayed, our server generates a unique set of custom, high quality, cryptographic-strength password strings which are safe for you to use"

### ***U.S.A.***

#### **The National Sex Offender Public Website**

<http://www.nsopr.gov/>

"The National Sex Offender Public Website connects all U.S. state, tribal, and territory web sites so that citizens can search for the identities and locations of known sex offenders"

You can also search registry web sites maintained by individual jurisdictions by following the links on this page maintained by the F.B.I.

<http://www.fbi.gov/scams-safety/registry>

There is also a "National Sex Offender Registry, a database only available

to law enforcement that is maintained by the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division"

**Advice from the U.S.A. government about preparing for disasters.**

<http://ready.gov>

This site maintained by Fema, has a special section for kids and their parents at <http://ready.gov/kids>

***U.K.***

**How to check if someone has a child sex offence record.**

<https://www.gov.uk/find-out-if-a-person-has-a-record-for-child-sexual-offences>

From the site: "The child sex offender disclosure scheme allows parents, carers and guardians to formally ask the police to tell them if someone has a record for child sexual offences. The aim of this scheme is to keep children safer."

## Be Alert and in Control

Don't panic because it's neither necessary nor helpful.

Please use the information and resources here to guide you and keep your eyes and your mind open.

That will guide you to better decisions and a more enjoyable life with your kids.



As well as connecting with your neighborhood, get involved in groups which promote safety and benefit your area in other ways.

Don't let the risks get in the way of experiencing and enjoying this wonderful world we share.

*Audrey Johnson*



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