

Boy Who Died Had Been Left In Vehicle Mother Forgot To Drop Son Off At Day Care, Investigators Say

POSTED: 2:52 pm CDT **May 4, 2012**

LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo. -- Investigators have released the cause of death for a Lee's Summit boy found unresponsive in his car seat late Thursday afternoon.

Police said the child's mother unintentionally left her 13-month-old son in the vehicle, forgetting that she hadn't dropped him off at day care. Temperatures were in the mid 80s on Thursday.

A Kansas City-based safety group, Kids and Cars, said there are, on average, 38 similar deaths every year.

"I think the biggest mistake that a parent or caregiver can make is to think that it can't happen to them," said Amber Rollins.

The child's death struck a chord with people close to the family and the strangers who watched police respond to the mother's emergency calls to help the child.

"I can't really imagine what they're going through now, the pains that they're going through," said neighbor Kevin McKinney.

The baby's mother is a teacher at Cedar Creek Elementary School, just a few blocks from where she found her child. Her husband is a teacher and coach at Lee's Summit West High School.

The schools have offered help to the family and activated a crisis plan, offering counseling to any student or staff member who might want it.

McKinney said he's been deeply affected by the child's death. He said it has made him think more about safety for his 4-year-old daughter, Jordan.

"Anyone can make a mistake and forget, you know, especially if your routine is changed a little bit," he said.

"I'm sure this community will support that family."

The Lee's Summit School District sent home a letter with Cedar Creek students on Friday. It notified parents about the death and said the students had been told about it, with counselors available. A substitute teacher is filling in.

"Sharing this heartbreaking news and leading our school family toward a healthy acceptance of this tragic event are tasks that lay ahead of us. Today, caring school staff and grief counselors met with staff and students. Every attempt was made to relay this news to your children with compassion and empathy. Many trained counselors will continue to be available to meet with students in small groups or individually as needs arise. Together, we will make it through this most difficult of times," the letter said.

Rollins said busy parents juggle many responsibilities, often with inadequate sleep. She said in past cases, she knows that people who always put their child's safety first, simply had other things cloud their minds.

"It's always a good idea to put something that you need in your day, like a cell phone, or a handbag or an employee ID or your briefcase in the back seat, so that you make it a routine to check the back seat every time you get out of your vehicle and make sure that your child is not in the car," Rollins said.

She said Kids and Cars are introducing a Look Before You Lock program to birthing centers to remind new parents how a split-second decision can lead to tragedy. The group is also sponsoring national legislation to require sensors and a warning system that alerts parents that a back seat is occupied.

She said busy parents can use all the help they can get.

"If you can't see them, you can't hear them," Rollins said. "Out of sight unfortunately and tragically means out of mind sometimes."

KMBC (ABC, Channel 9 News) –

<http://www.kmbc.com/r/31010820/detail.html>