



Alec



Aliviah



Banyan



Cade



Jack



Courtney



Agatha

CAR
WRECKS
ARE THE
LEADING
CAUSE
OF DEATH
AMONG
CHILDREN.



Gino



Christopher



Jasta



Drew



Douglas



Jessica



Kaycie



Joshua



Madison



Adrianna



Mika



Jacob

MOST
ACCIDENTS
TAKE
PLACE
WITHIN
A FEW
MILES OF
HOME.



Ariel



Milan



Davin



Tyler



Liam



Veronica



Giovanni



Zoie



Steven

PARENTS.COM

NOVEMBER 2006

Parents



Annabelle



Tegan



Preston



Tiffany



Cameron

THESE
ARE
THE
FACES
OF
CHILDREN
WHO
WERE
KILLED
IN
CAR
ACCIDENTS.

ANOTHER
1,700
KIDS
WILL
LIKELY
DIE
AGAIN
NEXT
YEAR.

**DRIVE
SAFELY!**

By Rick Newman

It's completely routine: You pop the kids in the minivan to drop them off for a playdate or run a couple of errands. Cars are such an everyday convenience that it's easy to forget how dangerous they can be. But the frightening reality is that even the shortest drive can turn catastrophic: More than 240,000 kids under age 16 are injured in car crashes every year, and another 1,700 are killed. "Motor-vehicle accidents are the single leading cause of death among children," says *Parents* advisor Dennis Durbin, M.D., codirector of the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "We're so accustomed to driving everywhere that we tend to get complacent about safety. But it's really important to be vigilant—especially if you've got kids."

To keep your family safe, we've compiled an action plan for cruising on the highway, driving around town, or even backing out of your driveway. Here's our comprehensive guide.

5 SURPRISING FACTS

1 MOST ACCIDENTS HAPPEN NEAR HOME. The car crashes you hear about on the evening news tend to be gory high-speed wrecks on busy interstates. But most accidents involving kids actually occur on local, residential roads during a routine trip to the day-care center, the grocery store, or the neighborhood park. That's why it's critical to take all the same precautions for a short drive that you'd take for a three-hour ride to Grandma's. "Always buckle your child up, no matter how near or far you're going," says Marilena Amoni, associate administrator for research and program development at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). "And never forget to use your own seat belt. Kids watch everything that you do, so it's important that you set the right example."

2 KIDS ARE MORE AT RISK THAN BABIES AND TODDLERS. Children between ages 4 and 8 are more likely to be injured in a car than kids under 4. That

may be because parents tend to slack off about safety as their children get older. Most moms and dads know to strap infants into a rear-facing car seat, for instance; but only 20 percent of kids between 4 and 8 ride in booster seats, as safety experts recommend. And many parents let children climb into the front seat well before they're 13, the minimum age considered safe for riding shotgun. Children are safest in the backseat, where they're farthest away from the impact point of a frontal crash, and where any surfaces they might bump into (the back of the front seats, for example) are likely to be softer than the dashboard.

3 SUVs DON'T KEEP YOUR FAMILY SAFER. You might think that driving a big, high vehicle insulates you from roadway dangers, but in general, test crashes show that SUVs are no safer than ordinary sedans. They're more likely to roll over, especially in a single-vehicle accident where a truck trips over a guardrail or flips during a fast turn. It's hard to make

SMART DRIVING MOVES



☒ **Always** keep your tires inflated to the correct pressure and check regularly for wear and damage. Make sure your spare tire is properly inflated and in good condition.



☒ **Check all** lights, including your brake and back-up lights. Keep extra bulbs and fuses in the car. Also periodically check your car's horn.



☒ **Check** wiper-fluid level and inspect windshield-wiper blades for cracks or brittleness. Replace blades whenever necessary, at least once a year.



☒ **Have a** mechanic check your brakes if the pedal feels different or if you hear noises when you slow down or stop. Check out any looseness or rattling in the steering wheel.



☒ **Keep an** emergency kit in your car. Make sure that it includes a flashlight, extra batteries, flares, reflective triangles, and jumper cables.

ABOUT KIDS AND CAR SAFETY

exact comparisons, but larger, lower vehicles (like station wagons) tend to be the safest family cars. Experts say that parents who want an SUV should get one equipped with electronic stability or anti-roll control, designed to help keep the vehicle from flipping over. And don't assume four-wheel drive will keep your kids safer, either. It helps improve traction in snow or mud, but it also encourages people to drive in conditions they otherwise wouldn't (or shouldn't).

4 A CAR DOESN'T HAVE TO BE MOVING TO BE DANGEROUS. Your station wagon isn't going to be involved in a pileup while it's in the driveway, but parked cars are also potentially deadly. And as many as 220 children per year are killed in nontraffic automobile accidents: Some are strangled by a window when they're leaning out and they (or someone else) inadvertently lean on a rocker-type power switch.

Others, playing alone in the car, somehow release the emergency brake or move the gear-shift lever, setting a car in motion. Still other children climb through fold-down rear seats into the trunk—then push the seat backs up and get trapped inside. Finally, at least 30



kids die each year when their parents leave them in the car and they suffocate from overheating. "Children should never, ever be left alone in an

automobile—not even for a minute," says Terrill Struttman, executive director of Kids in Cars, an education and advocacy organization he and his wife started after their 2-year-old son was killed by a car set in motion by two kids playing alone inside.

5 KIDS DON'T NEED TO BE INSIDE A CAR TO BE HURT BY ONE. Despite long-running campaigns to raise public awareness about pedestrian safety, nearly 400 kids age 15 and under are killed each year when they're hit by an automobile. So it's important to remain vigilant: No matter how many times you've warned your child to stay away from the street and to hold your hand in parking lots, you still need to keep a close eye on him—even in places where you might assume he's safe. A survey conducted by Safe Kids Worldwide found that a majority of drivers speed in school zones, and that nearly a third violate stop signs in neighborhoods where there are kids.

SAFETY FEATURES YOU SHOULD HAVE

Today's cars come with so many options it can be difficult to tell which actually make your kids safer and which merely put a few extra bucks in the salesperson's pocket. Here are the add-ons worth paying for.

»Anti-pinch power windows, doors, and liftgates. To safeguard small fingers, necks, and heads, anti-pinch devices automatically stop or reverse a motor's action when sensors detect something in the way. This technology is routine in Europe and is increasingly being offered in the U.S., especially on minivans and SUVs.

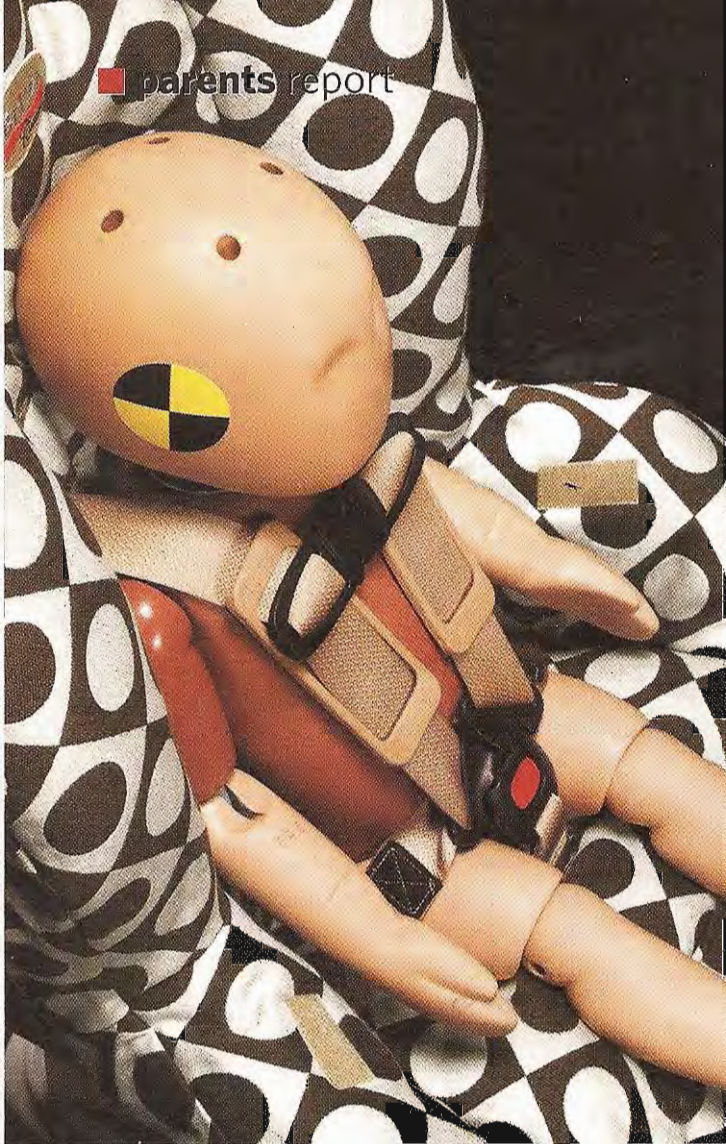
»Antilock brakes. These will enable you to stop more quickly and to steer while applying the brakes during a skid.

»Electronic stability control and/or anti-roll control. These features help keep your vehicle under control during turns and skids. They're especially important on SUVs and pickups.

»Extra LATCH fixtures. Automakers are only required to offer this system of car-seat connection points on the two outer positions of the rear seat. But some automakers offer additional LATCH connectors in the middle seat, or on the third row, if there is one.

»Back-up warning systems. Options include a closed-circuit back-up camera, which displays a live picture of what's behind you, and rear park-assist sensors, designed to beep when you back up to within scraping distance of an unseen object.





6 DEADLY CAR-

The NHTSA estimates that, at any given time, more than 70 percent of young automobile passengers are exposed to potentially fatal consequences because they're not properly strapped in. These are the most common slipups that you need to avoid.

1 BUYING THE WRONG SEAT. The salesperson might tell you that car seats are a one-size-fits-all product, but it's not that simple. Before buying a particular model car seat, parents should carry it out to the parking lot and try strapping it in using either the seat belts or, on newer model cars, the LATCH system. (The acronym stands for lower anchors and tethers for children, and these are standard on all cars made after 2002.) If you can't get a tight fit, if the tether straps don't match up properly with the anchors on the car, or even if it's simply awkward to handle the seat, try a different one until you find one that feels right.

2 NOT INSTALLING THE SEAT CORRECTLY. A car seat works best when it is so tight that it effectively becomes part of the car's structure; it should move no more than an inch when you shake it from side to side or pull it forward. To get a tight fit, put your knee into the seat and press your weight into it while cinching down the seat belt or the LATCH tether straps. If you use LATCH, you can't also use the car's seat belt, so buckle the seat belt behind the child restraint to discourage your child from playing with it.

IF YOU'RE IN AN ACCIDENT

There's a bang, a blur, and a skipped heartbeat: You're in a car crash. What next? Your main job now is to keep yourself—and your children—as safe as possible. Here are some things to remember if you've been in a serious accident.

»Get oriented.

Figure out where your car has ended up. If you can drive it, pull as far off the road and away from traffic as possible. If not, put hazard lights on and turn off the ignition immediately.

»Stay buckled.

Don't get out of the car unless it's absolutely necessary. Keep your kids restrained too.

»Call 911 immediately.

If you don't have a cell phone, try to flag down another car for help, staying inside or as close to your vehicle as possible.

»Check to see if any passengers are injured.

Don't move anybody unless it seems absolutely necessary.

»Remove the car seat with your child still strapped in if it's essential to get everyone out of the vehicle (in case of a car fire, for example).

»Never move a child who is injured. Stop bleeding by pressing a soft, clean cloth against the wound. Comfort your child and calmly tell him that help is on the way.



SEAT MISTAKES

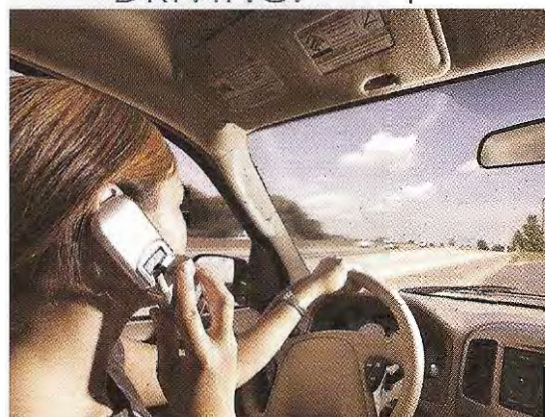
3 NOT TIGHTLY STRAPPING IN YOUR CHILD. Sometimes, parents loosen the car-seat harness when their child is wearing heavy clothing (like a snowsuit) and then forget to tighten it again later on. Or they simply loosen the straps thinking their child will be more comfortable. But it's critical that your child is always snugly strapped in: The harness should fit tightly. If you want to use blankets, wrap them around your child after she's securely buckled in. If your car seat comes with a plastic harness clip, keep it adjusted to armpit level to hold the shoulder straps securely in place. Remember to change the harness settings when you move the car seat from a rear-facing to a forward-facing position. When infants are facing backward, the harness straps should rest at or below their shoulders. When facing forward, they should be at or above shoulder level.

4 TURNING THE SEAT AROUND TOO SOON. Many parents like to see their baby in the rearview mirror or think he'll be happier if he's looking ahead. But turning the seat too soon can be a dangerous mistake. To be protected, children should stay in a rear-facing seat until they're at least a year old and 20 pounds. "Babies are especially vulnerable to head and spine injuries if their car seat isn't facing toward the back," says Dr. Durbin, who kept his own kids in rear-facing seats until they were 18 months. As for concerns about a child's legs being too big for a rear-facing seat, Dr. Durbin says don't worry: There's no evidence babies suffer unusual leg injuries.

5 BLOWING OFF BOOSTERS. While the use of car seats has gone up in recent years, the use of boosters for kids between 4 and 8 has actually gone down—even though kids can be severely injured without them. In a crash, a child can slip out of an ill-fitting adult shoulder belt or can "jackknife" over the lap belt, suffering head, face, abdominal, or spinal injuries. Boosters help keep kids safe because they raise the child to a height where the seat belt fits properly across her lap and chest. Children are more comfortable in boosters because kids' legs bend naturally at the end of the seat. It's also easier for children to sit upright in a booster, which in turn makes restraints most effective. Kids who are too big for car seats should use a booster until they reach a height of 4'9", regardless of age.

6 SLACKING OFF DURING CAR POOLS. It's enough of a hassle packing lunches, homework, and sports gear. No wonder most parents neglect to send along a booster seat when their kids get a ride in someone else's minivan. But it's important to get into the habit of making sure your child uses a booster, no matter whose car he's in. To make it easy, consider buying an extra one: Basic backless models cost about \$20, and there's no evidence that fancier, more expensive boosters are any safer. If you're the driver, insist every child in your car uses a booster at all times. You might even invest in a few extras to ensure that your young passengers stay safe.

HOW'S YOUR DRIVING?



STOP Do you talk on your cell phone (either handheld or hands-free) when you're behind the wheel? ☐ YES ☐ NO

STOP Do you drive when you're tired? ☐ YES ☐ NO

STOP Do you ever speed, tailgate, or pass cars on the right because you're in a hurry to get somewhere? ☐ YES ☐ NO

STOP Do you get angry if you're cut off by another driver or stuck in heavy traffic? ☐ YES ☐ NO

STOP Do you eat or drink while you're in the car? ☐ YES ☐ NO

STOP Have you ever used your rearview mirror to put on makeup or brush your hair while driving? ☐ YES ☐ NO

STOP Do you get behind the wheel after having a drink or taking medication? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If you've answered yes to even one of these questions, it's time to get serious. To keep your family safe, you need to reduce distractions and stay calm and in control whenever you're behind the wheel. Ask yourself this question: Would you want to be responsible for an accident that hurt your child or someone else's?

Avoid “seat-belt adjusters” or other products that claim to improve the way seat belts fit kids. These devices aren’t made in conjunction with car manufacturers, and they’re not subject to any safety standards. Instead, follow the guidelines for proper car-seat, booster-seat, and safety-belt use.



THE BACK-OVER DANGER

Misty Ennis was preparing to head out for a short trip to the store with her husband and their son, Chanse, when she heard a horrifying scream. She raced outside, where she saw her 3-year-old boy lying on the ground. “I think I backed up into him,” her husband yelled.

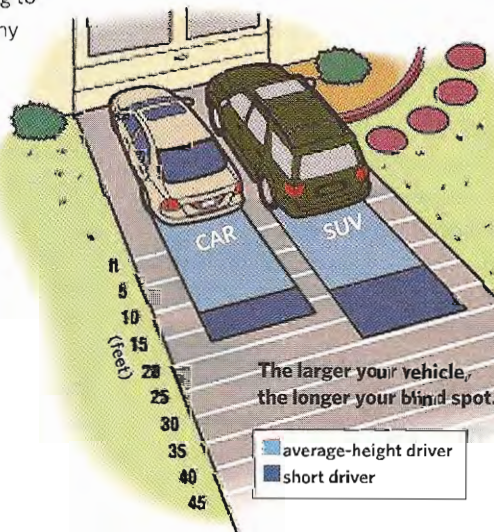
Chanse was lucky: His parents rushed him to the hospital, where doctors were able to repair a broken leg and a broken arm. Two years later, he is a healthy kindergartner—but he’s become a vocal safety advocate, always telling friends, “Watch out for cars.”

Most parents worry about avoiding accidents on the road, but nearly a hundred children under age 4 are killed annually when somebody backs over them in a driveway or parking lot, according to Janette Fennell, president of Kids and Cars, a safety advocacy group. Another 2,400 or so are hurt during back-over accidents. Adding to the tragedy is the fact that, in many cases, the driver is a parent or another family member.

These accidents typically happen when a curious toddler ventures out of the house or yard and into the driveway—and a parent doesn’t see him. Since every car is surrounded by at least a few blind spots—more if it’s an SUV, pickup truck, or other large vehicle—the stage is set for catastrophe.

Because there has been a spike in the number of back-over accidents in recent years, Democratic Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Republican Representative Peter King of New York and several other members of Congress have begun pushing for legislation that would require cars to have warning systems capable of detecting people or objects behind a vehicle. But even if the law passes, it won’t go into effect until model year 2010 at the earliest.

For now, some auto manufacturers offer warning systems as an option, but experts say that time-tested, low-tech safety checks work best. “It’s important that you know exactly where your child is and that you check around your vehicle before you get behind the wheel,” says Fennell. “And once you’re in the car, make sure that you always use your mirrors and that you back up slowly.”



RESOURCES

» Find an expert to help install your car seat on the NHTSA's Website (www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/contacts/). To get your own car-seat installation inspected by a specialist, go to seatcheck.org or call 866-SEATCHECK.

» Safe Kids Worldwide offers a car-seat inspection-station locator (usa.safekids.org).

» The NHTSA gives ratings and other info on 100 car-seat models (www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cssrating/Index.cfm).

» The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (chop.edu/carseat) provides safety information on car seats and boosters.

» Two similarly named organizations—Kids in Cars (kidsincars.org) and Kids and Cars (kidsandcars.org)—provide safety information on their Websites.

» The American Academy of Pediatrics publishes a comprehensive set of car-seat guidelines (aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm).