

## Clairen Reese: Take thirty seconds and save a life

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What do you get when you combine beautiful weather, summer vacation and lots of kids playing outside? Normally, a great deal of fun and activity in and around your yard and throughout the neighborhood.

For the younger tots, that can mean playing in the front yard, or sometimes in the driveway around parked cars.

Although kids may be close to home, those vehicles can be a potential danger zone.

How many times have you seen a kid lose a ball, a pet or even scurry under a car to catch an elusive bug? Or better yet, NOT seen a small child rush outside after a departing parent?

Many times, little ones play behind a vehicle in a driveway. With a youngster's imagination and sense of adventure, he could even crawl underneath a car or in between the wheel well for a little game of hide and go seek. Generally, there's not a problem, unless an unsuspecting adult happens to get into the car and drive away.

According to Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kids and Cars, a child safety advocacy group, more than 50 children in the U.S. are backed over by vehicles every week, and 48 are treated in hospital emergency rooms, with two suffering fatal injuries. The predominant age of victims is 12-23 months. More than 60 percent of backing accidents involve a larger size vehicle, such as a van, truck or SUV. Seventy percent of the accidents involve a relative.

"These unthinkable tragedies are happening most often in the driveway of the child's home, and in 70 percent of the incidents, the driver is their parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling," Fennell said.

A typical scenario for tragic accidents such as these often includes a child running outside to say good-bye to a family member one last time before they leave. This is named the "bye-bye syndrome."

Kids and Cars says that young children are impulsive and unpredictable; still have very poor judgment and little understanding of danger. In addition, young children do not recognize boundaries such as property lines, sidewalks, driveways or parking spaces. Toddlers have established independent mobility between the ages of 12-23 months, but the concept of personal safety is absent.

Child safety advocates say the problem is only going to get worse unless we work for better visibility in the cars we drive.

According to a recent report, the federal government has delayed a mandate that rear-view cameras be installed in every new vehicle sold. The good news is that the Department of Transportation has said that after additional study to get specifics right, it will put the rule out by the end of the year.

This still leaves untold numbers of older vehicles without the devices. So what can be done to protect children from such a tragic accident?

One solution is to work to make this problem well known. I recently received an email from a friend who works at a major corporation encouraging employees, friends and family to practice the 360 Circle for Safety. They told about an employee of another utility who found a very young child hiding in the wheel well of a company truck. Had the employee driving not checked thoroughly around the vehicle before driving away, the child would have been killed. The 360 Circle for Safety encourages all drivers to do a pre-drive safety walk in which they check the vehicle for any potential hidden hazards that they'd not otherwise notice from the driver's seat, such as little ones lurking, hiding, resting or playing underneath.

According to Kids and Cars, there are other safety precautions you should practice. Know where your kids are at all times and ensure they are not playing around a vehicle when it is going to be moved. Educate children about the dangers of playing around parked cars and that, while they may be able to see the driver, the driver may not be able to see them. Remove all toys and sports equipment from the driveway and keep landscaping trimmed to clearly see the sidewalk. Keep car doors locked at all times and never leave children alone in or around cars for any reason whatsoever.

Other suggestions include installing cross-view mirrors, audible collision detectors, rear-view video cameras or some kind of back-up detection device.

To ensure the safety of your kids and others, make it a habit to practice these simple things starting today. It could mean the difference of life or death.

<http://www.pnj.com/article/20120530/LIFE/305300007/Clairen-Reese-Take-thirty-seconds-save-life?odyssey=tab%7Ctopnews%7Ctext%7CLife>