

Look before locking

Heat can quickly affect children left in car

By Jeanni Brosius This article was published July 12, 2012 at 4:08 a.m.

LITTLE ROCK — KidsAndCars.org lists BE SAFE safety tips on its website. These tips are being distributed to new parents to raise awareness about the dangers of leaving a child in a vehicle.

B is for back seat: Put something, such as a cellphone, an employee badge or a handbag in the back seat of the vehicle that requires the door to be opened after parking.

E is for every child: Every child should be correctly restrained in the back seat.

S is for stuffed animal: Keep a stuffed animal in the child's car seat. Place it on the front seat as a reminder when the baby is in the back seat.

A is for ask: Ask the childcare provider to call if the child hasn't arrived on time.

F is for focus on driving: Don't make phone calls or text while driving.

E is for every time the car is parked, make it a routine to open the backdoor to check that no one has been left behind.

It seems that it would be common sense to not leave one's child in a hot car. But many times, parents can get in a hurry and out of their normal routines, which can lead to them forgetting that a child is in the back seat of the car. That can lead to dire consequences for the child, including death. It doesn't take long for temperatures to rise to harmful levels.

"Within 10 minutes, the temperature in a car can jump 19 degrees; in 20 minutes, 29 degrees; in 30 minutes, 34 degrees; in 60 minutes, 43 degrees; and in one to two hours, it can jump 40 to 50 degrees," said Dr. Ted Shields, an emergency-department doctor at White River Medical Center in Batesville. "Leaving down or cracking the windows has no effect, and the surface temperatures reach up to 170 to 200 degrees.

"I'm an ER doctor, and we see a lot of people with heat exhaustion and heat strokes. There are about 30 child fatalities a year (nationwide), and more than 50 percent are under the age of 2, especially since the advent of front air bags, and we have to keep our children in the back seat."

Shields said when the body reaches 107 degrees, the thermoregulatory center in the brain can no longer regulate the body's temperature, and the body begins to shut down.

"A child's body temperature rises three to five times faster than adults, putting them at greater risk of heat stroke," Shields said.

"FORGOTTEN BABY SYNDROME"

Brain and memory expert David Diamond is a professor in the University of South Florida department of psychology and a research career scientist at J.A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa. In a press release on the website KidsandCars.org, Diamond's hypothesis of "Forgotten Baby Syndrome" is discussed.

Diamond contends that the syndrome is something that can happen to normal, loving and attentive parents. According to the release, Diamond said his research evaluated whether there is a consistent pattern of circumstances that may provide insight into the syndrome, and he hypothesized that it occurs as a result of the competition between cognitive and habit forms of memory.

According to the release, Diamond's research says cognitive memory occurs when one consciously plans out a task to accomplish in the future - for example, planning to take a child to day care as part of a larger driving plan. In contrast, habit memory occurs when one performs a routine that can be completed automatically with minimal thought, such as driving to work in an "autopilot" mode, in which decisions as to where to stop and turn occur automatically.

See more about Diamond's research at psychology.usf.edu/faculty/diamond.

MAKE A REMINDER

There are several tips to help remember that a child is in the back seat, and one of those is to leave a stuffed animal in the baby's seat. When the child is strapped into the seat, move the stuffed animal to the front seat as a reminder.

White County Medical Center partnered with the Look Before You Lock Program last year and recently received a new delivery of stuffed animals to distribute to parents in the hospital's New Life Center.

Ten-year-old Canyon Williams of Ward had the idea of using the stuffed animals and began collecting them in 2011 for WCMC to distribute to new parents. Each stuffed animal comes with a card attached that instructs parents to place the animal in the front seat with them when a child is buckled into a car seat.

WCMC was the first hospital in Arkansas to become a Look Before You Lock health care partner. According to a press release from the hospital, Canyon became interested in the issue when his mother, Juanita, shared information with him on the number of children who died in 2010 after being left alone in vehicles.

"We were reading something online on child fatalities and injuries, and the ones from heatstroke were astounding," Juanita said Tuesday about how Canyon began collecting stuffed animals. "We thought how simple that would be for us to hand out stuffed animals."

Through the K-Kids program at Eastside Elementary School in Cabot, Canyon was able to begin collecting the animals to deliver to the hospital.

Juanita said the animals need to be at least nine inches tall to be effective, and they should be new.

"We can't take stuffed animals that have been in homes with smokers or pets because they are going to newborns," she said.

Canyon has hopes of taking his project farther by working with Arkansas Children's Hospital to help educate even more parents about the dangers of children and cars.

Shields said that leaving children in cars isn't the only way they can suffer a heat stroke or heat exhaustion.

Simply playing outside can lead to potential illness.

"When kids are playing outside, make sure they are well hydrated," he said.

"If your child suddenly goes missing, always check the pool first and the car second, including the trunk."

He also said to never leave a child in a car, even for a minute.

Staff writer Jeanni Brosius can be reached at (501) 244-4307 or jbrosius@arkansasonline.com
Three Rivers, Pages 47 on 07/12/2012

<http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2012/jul/12/look-locking-20120712/?f=threerivers>