

A little change in routine brings visions of disaster for a mother

3:36 PM, Jul 16, 2012 | Written by [Siobhan McAndrew](#)

I called my daughter's day care twice last week. As I dialed, I tried to convince myself I was calling to check on a rash — at least, that's how I wanted it to sound.

"Eczema is serious," I told myself.

I could hear the panic in my voice as I asked to be transferred to the baby room. My heart raced. I held my breath waiting for confirmation that my little pumpkin was OK.

Both times the teacher said the rash looked fine. I was relieved. I calmed down. I unclenched my grip on my iPhone. I'm a mother who worries, just ask my pediatrician. But I'm not such a nervous wreck that a rash sends me into mommy meltdown mode. I was worried about the rash, but I was much more worried about the change in our family routine with temperatures in Reno hitting over 100.

When my computer had a breakdown, my husband and I changed our morning routines. He volunteered to take the baby to school to help me out as I cursed my computer in baby-friendly language.

"Mommy still loves her job, but she doesn't like her computer right now," I said as I frantically dressed, fed and kissed her goodbye as they left.

I waited, calculating my husband's drive time to day care. I gave him an extra few minutes before I sent the first text. I didn't want him to think I don't trust him, but I've paid for gas and then pulled away without filling up. I've locked my keys in the car and left groceries in the trunk.

"How did drop-off go?" I wrote. When I didn't hear back, I called.

"I want to know how she did at school so call me back RIGHT away," I said to his voicemail. I called again. No answer. Another text message sent.

I got ready for work as I listened to the news reports of two separate instances of children being left in cars in Indiana.

"We are exactly the kind of parents this kind of thing happens to," I thought as I imagined the worst.

Since having a baby a year ago, I've been haunted by the stories of parents who accidentally leave their children in the car on hot days.

The children die a painful death as the inside of a car can exceed 100 degrees in seconds.

From the stories, including a Pulitzer Prize-winning piece by the Washington Post two years ago, the type of person who does this isn't a psycho, addict or uncaring parent.

The people who do this are busy working parents who make the deadly mistake to change one thing in their morning routine. They are parents who childproof the house and research day cares and car seats with vigor.

The frazzled parent leaves the house, tired and stressed about work, and goes to the office only to realize his or her horrible mistake hours later.

It happens to the parent who doesn't normally take the baby to school or the babysitter. It happened 33 times last year. It has happened 12 times this year.

My husband called me back.

He was glad to hear her rash looked better, too.

Kids and cars safety tips

- If you see a child alone in a vehicle, get involved. Call 911. The Reno Police Department said they can't tell citizens to break windows or doors but will say people need to use common sense. If you see a child in distress, make a judgement call and do whatever you have to do to get them out as soon as possible.
- Make arrangements with your child's day care center or babysitter that you will call if your child will not be there as scheduled. Give child care providers all your telephone numbers, including that of an extra family member or friend, so they can always confirm your child's whereabouts. If your schedule varies, agree to text or call your spouse or family member as soon as you have dropped your child off. Make it part of your routine.
- Never leave, even for a minute, children alone in or around cars.
- Put something you'll need like your cellphone, handbag, employee ID, shoes or briefcase on the floor in the back seat.
- Get in the habit of always opening the back door of your vehicle every time you reach your destination to make sure no child has been left behind. This will become a habit. It is called the "Look Before You Lock" campaign.
- Keep a large stuffed animal in the child's car seat when it's not occupied. When the child is placed in the seat, put the

stuffed animal in the front passenger seat. It's a visual reminder that any time the stuffed animal is up front, the child is in the back seat.

- Keep vehicles locked at all times, even in the garage or driveway.
- Keys and/or remote openers should never be left within reach of children.
- Make sure all child passengers have left the vehicle after it is parked.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and car trunks immediately.
- Be especially careful about keeping children safe in and around cars during busy times, schedule changes and periods of crisis or holidays.

Sources: kidsandcars.org, Reno Police Department

More information

To read the Washington Post's "Fatal Distraction" go to www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/27/AR2009022701549.html

Siobhan McAndrew is a reporter and columnist with a 1-year-old daughter. She can be reached at smcandrew@rgj.com.
http://www.rgj.com/article/20120716/LIV/307160040/A-little-change-routine-brings-visions-disaster-mother?nclick_check=1