

# Where's the Baby? Forgotten in the Hot Car

By Lorie Johnson CBN News Medical Reporter **Wednesday, July 18, 2012**



On these hot days, the temperature inside your car can climb above 120 degrees in as little as 30 minutes. That's why you should never leave children or pets in the car, not even for a moment.

A child's body temperature rises three to five times more quickly than an adult's. Still, deadly accidents happen each year. Parents forget their child is in the car with them. It often happens to responsible parents who have a momentary lapse in memory, which psychologists say is possible if the child can't be seen or heard, and if the parent

is distracted, tired, or stressed-out.

## Unforgettable Tragedy

This happened to an Austin, Texas, couple, who are now committed to educating the public about ways to prevent their tragedy from happening to anyone else.

May 25, 2011. Although they didn't know it, it would be the last morning Brett and Kristie Cavaliero would see their little girl, nicknamed Ray-Ray.

The morning started off hectic because the three of them slept in much later than usual. After hurrying around, they were ready to go.

Kristie recalled the last time she waved good-bye to her daughter.

"I took her to the truck with Brett and we both put her in her car seat together," she said.

While in the truck, Ray-Ray fell asleep. Brett forgot she was there.

"Daycare is only about 300 yards to the left, and I drop her off, and circle back this way," Brett explained. "Well, I took a right instead."

"And so our tragedy revolves around one wrong turn," Kristie lamented.

Brett tries to understand how he forgot his daughter was with him in the truck.

"My best guess is that when I made that right-hand turn, my mind was on auto pilot, and I was on my way to work," he said.

Brett parked in his usual parking spot and went in to work just like any other day, still forgetting his daughter was asleep in his truck.

Kristie met Brett for lunch. They drove her car. She recalled how they talked about Ray-Ray.

"It wasn't until I picked up Brett for our lunch date that he remembered, he couldn't remember, dropping her off at school that day," she said.

Then reality hit Brett like a ton of bricks.

"And I said to my wife, 'I think Ray's in my truck,'" he said.

By that time it was too late. Ray-Ray had become one of nearly 300 children to die of heat stroke, also called hyperthermia, after being forgotten in a hot car. Her body temperature had reached the fatal level of 107 degrees.

## It Can Happen to Anyone

Many people think those who forget their children in a car are bad parents. But experts say that's not true.

"The sad truth is, any of us could do that," psychologist Dr. David Miller said.

Miller explained that our short-term memory only holds about seven items of information at a time. If we keep trying to put more information into our short-term memory, some items will be forgotten.

"And if you can picture a glass, my short term memory is a glass. And I pour my seven items in there. And in order for me to add more, some has to come out." Miller explained.

He said things like being distracted can actually create false memories.

"In the short-term memory (is) the check list, if you will, of the things that we have to do," Miller explained. "If we are going through our mental check list and something distracts us, then our check list, we may have actually gone through and checked off something we haven't done."

## Kids and Cars

Add to all of that the fact that many of the children forgotten in cars are neither heard nor seen. Most of them have fallen asleep and are situated behind the driver in rear-facing car seats.

Despite being at risk for being forgotten, placing a baby in a rear-facing car seat in the back seat is actually the safest place for them.

When the government began requiring air bags in the front of all vehicles, hundreds of infants died when the air bags were deployed, even if what caused their deployment was a simple fender-bender.

Safety experts realized the force of a deployed air bag could be deadly when it struck a tiny body.

Janette Fennell is the president and founder of KidsAndCars.org, an organization dedicated to educating the public about the ways to avoid forgetting kids in cars.

She said rear-facing car seats placed in the back seat pose a real challenge.

"If anyone's ever seen that in a car, if you're the driver, you can't really tell if there's a baby in that car seat or not," she explained.

"It's not like their head sticks above the top, because if it does, they're in the wrong car seat," she said.

### **Safety Tips**

In addition to KidsAndCars.org, Ray-Ray's parents are also dedicated to making sure what happened to them doesn't happen to anyone else.

Even the U.S. Department of Transportation [launched a campaign](#) to educate people on ways to avoid this tragedy.

Here are a few tips:

- Make a habit of just simply looking in your child's car seat every time you exit your vehicle, regardless of whether your child is in it at the time.
- Put your purse, your briefcase, your computer, anything you are sure to take with you as you exit the car, in the back seat near the car seat.
- Keep one of your child's toys, such as a stuffed animal, in the car seat at all times. However, when your child is in the car seat, put the toy up front with you to remind you that your child is in his or her car seat.

Since many of the children who are forgotten in cars were on their way to daycare, Brett and Kristie Cavaliero came up with what's known as [Ray-Ray's Pledge](#) for parents and daycare providers.

An estimated 20 percent of all children who perish in hot cars were on their way to daycare. However, so far this year, that number is 50 percent.

Most daycares do not make any inquiries when a child does not show up in the morning. They simply assume the child is sick or out of town.

In other words, there is usually no accountability for child absences in the daycare community.

Brett and Kristie want to change that. If there had been accountability, Ray-Ray and other children would be alive today. If the daycare had called them when Ray-Ray didn't show up that day, she could have been saved.

The idea behind Ray-Ray's Pledge is for parents and daycare providers to establish a pact whereby the daycare knows whether the child is supposed to be there or not, and to act quickly if the child isn't there when they are supposed to be there.

"Should the child not arrive by his or her usual arrival time and a planned absence has not already been communicated," Kristie explained, "They will call one or both parents until they find out where that child's whereabouts are."

### **Sounding the Alarm**

Car seat alarms are also a viable option. Manufacturers such as [Suddenly Safe 'N' Secure Systems, Inc.](#), and [Baby Alert International](#) sell their products online. Even NASA got into the act when engineer Chris Edwards invented a car seat alarm.

Edwards admitted it was a departure from what he normally does.

"Well, we had a local incident where a child died, and this was my way of dealing with it," he said.

The alarms consist of a car seat sensor that is placed in the car seat and is activated by the weight of your baby in the seat. Another sensor with an alarm goes on your key chain. If you walk away from the car with your baby still in the car seat, the alarm goes off.

Edwards called his invention a simple way to save lives.

"So the parts in it are pretty inexpensive. They're readily available. It should be easy for a manufacturer to make a product out of them," he said.

Parents need to realize there are a number of safety nets they can put into place to lessen the chance of forgetting their child is in the car.

Thanks to the efforts of [KidsAndCars.org](http://KidsAndCars.org), Congress recently passed legislation aimed at preventing parents from leaving kids behind in cars.

One portion of the bill mandates seat belt alarms in the back seat of vehicles, and the other portion is to study technology such as car seat alarms to determine whether car seat or auto manufacturers require them.

"If our vehicles can tell us if we've let our headlights on, so we don't get a dead battery, I think it's equally, of course, more important, to have a reminder so we don't have a dead baby," Fennell said.

<http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/healthscience/2012/July/Wheres-the-Baby-Forgotten-in-the-Hot-Car/>