

Child Safety Advocates Warn Any Parent Can Make a Deadly Summertime Mistake

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So far this year, 23 children nationwide have died from being left alone in cars in the summer heat. In most cases, children are unknowingly left behind, but regardless, parents experience the life-long grief of losing a child.

A jury in Louisville this week found a mother guilty in the death of her toddler son who was left alone in a car for nearly 12 hours. Mollie Shouse's murder conviction is believed to be the first in Jefferson County related to the death of a child in a hot

car. Prosecutor Erin McKenzie presented evidence that Shouse was inside her apartment passed out from drugs when her two-year-old was sweltering in his car seat outside.

"That 180 degree plastic is burning his skin, his diaper is soaked, he's had nothing to drink, and he is all alone. She's inside sleeping it off," McKenzie said in closing statements to the jury.

Erica Janes is a nurse at Kosair Children's Hospital in Louisville.

"It takes only ten minutes for the inside of a car to heat up by 20 degrees and it continues to heat up quickly even if windows are cracked. People have to remember that children, their body heats up three to five times faster than an adult body," said Janes. "Literally, their bodies are cooking inside these hot cars. They experience a heat stroke, their organs shut down, and they cannot breathe, so they suffocate and their heart stops beating"

This week in Nashville, 38-year-old Stephanie Gray, went to pick up her five-month-old baby from a church daycare center. When she was informed her son was never dropped off, she frantically ran back to her mini-van to find the infant in the back seat. Staff at the daycare tried to revive the child, but it was too late.

Janette Fennell is president of [kidsandcars.org](#), a group that tracks car-related deaths involving children. She says in cases where children are left alone in cars, parents are charged 60% of the time, yet convictions occur in just about 10% of the cases.

"The other 90 percent of people in most cases are the most fabulous, doting, caring parents that have every safety device imaginable to man. We're talking teachers, lawyers, doctors. There's no real commonality to who this happens to," said Fennell.

Fennell's group works to raise awareness that this kind of tragedy can happen to any family.

"The number one age of children who die in this manner are infants, under the age of one. So what's different about this age group and how could they be overly affected? Well, number one, they're traveling in a vehicle rear-facing. Secondly, anyone that's a parent knows you're sleep-deprived," said Fennell.

Fennell says stress or even a change in routine can affect a parent's memory. In the case of the Nashville baby, it was only his second day going to daycare. The mother dropped off her older children at school and returned home, leaving infant inside the van parked in the driveway.

Child safety experts encourage parents to create cheat sheets for themselves by placing something in the back seat that requires them to open the door every time they get out of their vehicle, such as a purse or briefcase. Also, parents should ask their child-care provider to call them if their child hasn't arrived on time. Avoid the added distraction of talking or texting on a cell phone. And finally, if any member of the public sees a child left alone in a vehicle, get involved...call 911 to report it immediately.

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