


COLUMN: Save a life and look before you lock

 By [Susan Moody, Emerald Coast Insider](#) Published: Tuesday, July 2, 2013 at 11:48 AM.

A few summers ago, when Alex and Harper were both in traditional, five point harness car seats, Harper and I were out running errands. After one particular stop, I put her in Alex's car seat. I can't quite remember the reason, but I have a vague recollection her seat being covered in some sort of spit up. Regardless of the reason, when we made our last stop of the morning, and I looked over my shoulder to her car seat, I found that it was empty.

If you've ever temporarily lost your child, you are, right now, reliving that momentary sense of panic. It took a few seconds for me to remember where Harper was, and everything turned out fine, but for the more than 35 children who die in hot cars every year, the ending isn't so happy.

Last Saturday, a three-year-old Orlando boy was left in a car while his parents attended a funeral. Three hours later, he was found, dead of hyperthermia, or heat stroke. As of the end of June, there have been 15 heatstroke deaths nationally, and four in Florida. According to public health experts, children's body temperatures rise three to five times faster than an adults, and even a partially cracked window won't stop the internal temperatures of a parked car from rising well above 125 degrees. According to the nonprofit advocacy group, Kids and Cars, most heatstroke related deaths are unintentional.

"If you are capable of forgetting your cell phone in your car, you are potentially capable of forgetting your child," says Dr. David Diamond, Professor of Molecular Physiology at University of South Florida.

According the Kids and Cars website, a change in normal routines, lack of sleep, stress, and fatigue all make multi-tasking that much more interesting. Parents of infants, already under a fair amount of stress, fatigue, and sleep deprivation, are more likely to forget their child in the back of car, simply because infants are often lulled to sleep in their rear facing car seat. A sleeping baby won't give the same noisy, verbal and physical cues that an alert and active toddler or preschooler might. More than one third of all car related heat stroke deaths are in infants under the age of one.

Heat and heatstroke-related death and injuries are preventable accidents, and there are a number of strategies you can employ to ensure the safety and well-being of your young passengers (or pets).

- Put something you need in your back seat every day. This could be your laptop, your phone, your ID badge, or your purse.
- "Look Before You Lock." Start opening the back door of your vehicle every time you reach your destination. I used to do this when Alex and Harper were little, because I was terrified of losing my keys and locking them in the car, even in my own garage.
- Put a large stuffed animal in your child's car seat. Put the stuffed animal in the passenger seat when your child is in his or her car seat. You'll need to check local traffic laws to see if stuffed animals count as passengers for HOV lanes, if applicable.
- Make arrangements with your sitter or child care provider to call you if you haven't arrived within 10 minutes of your usual drop off time.
- Keep keys and remote openers away from small children to avoid accidentally locking them in the car.
- If you see a child left in a heated car, don't hesitate to act. If they appear to be suffering from heat stroke, look lethargic, or hot, remove them from the car quickly, and then call 911.

The safety lesson advocacy groups are trying to teach is that this can happen to even the most attentive and diligent parent. It's happened to a nurse, a dentist, an accountant, a social worker, even a rocket scientist. The temperature along the Emerald Coast is only going to get warmer, and lives are only going to get busier, so let's make a point to "Look before We Lock."

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