

# What kind of person could forget a child in a car? Anyone, experts say

By [Irene Ogrodnik](#) Global News, May 28, 2014 3:52 pm



*Sophia is seen in this photo provided by her family - Kristie Reeves*

## SAFETY TIPS

It was 'tropical day' at their Austin, Texas daycare, so Sophia Rayne "Ray Ray" Cavaliero's parents dressed up their one-year-old in a flowered dress.

"She smiled back as if she knew she looked so adorable," said Kristie Reeves, Ray Ray's mother. "We kissed her and told her we loved her as we buckled her in her seat, and she waved the most mysterious goodbye to us—a wave we had never seen before and one we would never forget."

It was the last goodbye they would ever have from their "little angel."



*Sophia or "Ray Ray" with her parents in a family photo.*

Brett drove away with his sleeping daughter in his truck. For reasons Kristie said she and her husband still do not fully understand, Brett drove past the turn that he would normally take to drop Ray Ray off at daycare.

Assuming his child was in the hands of her daycare teachers, he continued to drive to work.

It was only when she met her husband that day for lunch hours later and they spoke of how "cute their daughter looked on tropical day" that Kristie said reality hit.

The couple rushed back to Brett's work and called the office manager to check the truck. Another call to the daycare

confirmed Ray Ray wasn't there.

Kristie said both she and the office manager called 911.

"But the nightmare had happened," she said. "Ray Ray had been forgotten for nearly three hours in 90 degree (Fahrenheit) heat."

On May 25, 2011, Ray Ray died due to vehicular heart stroke.

"Our last visions of our living daughter were of her lying on the floor as she lost consciousness and CPR was being performed," she said. "She gazed into mommy and daddy's eyes one last time. That will haunt us forever."

Kristie said she can understand why people ponder how one could possibly forget their child in a car and it's a question she gets asked to this day.

"It's much easier to dismiss these stories if you tell yourself these people are nothing like you," she told Global News.



*Sophia is seen in this photo provided by her family.  
Kristie Reeves*

## **Forgotten Baby Syndrome**

Children are accidentally left behind in hot vehicles every year in Canada and the U.S. While experts say the mistake is preventable, most parents still think it could never happen to them.

When these tragedies happen, the parents or caregivers—who have already endured a profound loss—are often subjected to extremely harsh public scrutiny.

Here is some of the reaction Global News [recently received to a story about safety tips](#) to keep from leaving a child in the car:

“What kind of parent forgets their child in a car?”

“I don’t understand how anyone can forget they have a child in the car.”

“Whatever happened to common sense?”

Known as “Forgotten Baby Syndrome” (FBS), experts say the extreme memory lapse can easily happen to anyone.

[The Canada Safety Council says that while no Canadian data is available](#), an average of 38 of these types of deaths occur each year from heat-related incidents in the United States.

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And these often happen when parents or caregivers are distracted, fatigued or experience a break in daily routine.

Dr. David Diamond, professor at the University of South Florida department of psychology, says FBS occurs as a result of the competition between cognitive and habit forms of memory.

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“Cognitive memory takes place when one consciously plans out a task to accomplish in the future,” [he said](#). “This occurs, for example, when planning to take a child to daycare as a 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,” he said.

Diamond says that brain habit and cognitive systems are “in a constant state of competition.”

“The brain habit memory system has the capacity to completely suppress the cognitive memory system, thereby providing a neurobiological explanation of how FBS can occur.”

Several factors like sleep deprivation, work-related stress, relationship problems and even certain medications can all affect the prefrontal cortex—a key part of the brain used for multi-tasking and task management.

“Any one of these changes can cause your memory to fail at a time when you least expect it.”

### **Never leave a child unattended, even for a moment**

Just last week, emergency crews converged on the parking lot of an Edmonton grocery store after a passerby noticed a little boy had been left alone inside a hot, locked vehicle.

Police say the boy was rescued a short time after emergency crews arrived. He had been in the car for 35 minutes.

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Officials said the child was dehydrated and taken to the Stollery Children’s Hospital. The mother of the little boy has been arrested and police said they have contacted Child Protective Services.

Even on days that seem relatively mild, experts say it only takes 20 minutes for the interior of a vehicle to reach extreme temperatures.

“Exposure to these conditions can cause a child to overheat, go into shock and sustain vital organ failure,” said Raynald Marchand of the Canada Safety Council. “In the confined space of a car, temperatures can climb so rapidly that they overwhelm a child’s ability to regulate his or her internal temperature. The body, especially a small body, can go into shock quickly, and circulation to vital organs can fail.”

Children, says Marchand, are especially sensitive to heat exposure because their sweat glands are not fully developed, which means their bodies are not capable of cooling down quickly.

READ MORE: [How extreme heat affects the body](#)

“When exposed to heat, a child’s body temperature rises three times faster than an adult in the same conditions,” he said. “Leaving a window slightly open, or ‘cracked,’ does little to prevent the temperature from rising to a level that is dangerous for children, vulnerable adults and pets.”

“Develop the habit of consciously checking that all occupants are out of the vehicle before it is parked and locked. The simple advice is to never leave a child alone in a vehicle – not even for a minute.”

### **Is there anything—or anyone—you’ve forgotten?**

[Aside from providing these ‘Be Safe’ safety tips](#) to parents and caretakers to ensure children are kept safe in cars, [KidsAndCars.org](#) also recommends that parents and caregivers keep cars locked while in garages or driveways to prevent children from playing in them and those key and remote openers should never be left within reach of children.

READ MORE: [How to keep your child safe from heat stroke in cars](#)

While safety devices currently exist to alert parents or caregivers that a child has been left in the car, experts say most of the technology “requires much setup work,” and fails to address the “20 to 40 per cent of kids who are killed in hot cars when they enter a vehicle without adult permission.”

In 2002, NASA created the Child Presence Sensor (CPS)—a safety device that would alert parents who inadvertently leave their infants and small children strapped in car seats.

“There are systems already installed in our vehicles to warn us that we have left our headlights on or our keys in the ignition,” said Janette E. Fennell, co-founder and executive director of KidsAndCars.org at the time. “Our precious children deserve at least that same protection.”

The Child Presence Sensor driver alarm was designed to hang on the driver’s key ring and would sound ten warning beeps if the driver moved too far away from the vehicle. The prototype, however, never launched because the product was never licensed to a commercial manufacturer.

### Ray Ray’s Pledge

Kristie told Global that she and her husband have tried to sublimate their grief, anger and sadness into something positive by channelling these emotions into something that will help others.

“Hopefully preventing other parents from experiencing the same kind of tragedy as ours,” she said.

Shortly after her daughter’s death, Kristie and her husband collaborated with Ray Ray’s daycare teachers, friends, and family to develop “[Ray Ray’s Pledge](#),” a program aimed at providing a safety net surrounding the morning drop-off time at daycare, a known high-risk time of day for vehicular heatstroke tragedies.

“We know that nothing can undo the mistake we made which led to her tragedy but we made a promise to her that her short life would not be just a horrible statistic,” said Kristie. “We promised her that we would do everything in our power to save other little babies like her from the same fate, in her honour.”

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