



## When parents accidentally forget children in hot cars

Posted By: [Amy Graff](#) ( [moms@sfgate.com](mailto:moms@sfgate.com) ) | Jun 25 at 5:37 pm

The story of Kyrese Dwayne Anderson is tragic.

The 3-year-old boy was left in a hot car in Florida for three hours and died of hyperthermia last Saturday.

You're probably immediately drawing all sorts of conclusions about the boy's parents. They must be mindless, hardhearted low-lives—the type of people who've been charged with child neglect in the past. Drugs must be involved. They must have been looking for cheap day care and intentionally left him in the car. Right?

Actually, no details like this are coming out in this case. Kyrese's death seems to be a the worst possible sort of mistake.

News organizations are reporting that Kyrese was left in the car while his parents Robert Anderson, 29, and Amanda Jo Anderson, 30, were at a funeral. Before the funeral, the parents took two cars to drop their children off with a babysitter at 1 p.m. The parents delivered their two older children but they forgot Kyrese in the back of the vehicle that they left parked at the babysitter's house. (It sounds as if one parent thought the other had brought Kyrese into the house.) The couple drove the other car to the funeral, thinking all three of their kids were playing happily at the sitter's.

When they returned after the funeral at 4 p.m., the babysitter said she assumed Kyrese was with his parents.

The Andersons rushed to the car they'd left at the house and confronted the worst possible nightmare. Their beloved son was dead.

Every summer when temperature spike, the news is rife with stories of babies and young children who are left in hot cars and die. Last year, 33 children died. So far 15 have died this year. These deaths can happen fast as a child's body temperature rises three to five times faster than an adult's and the temperature inside a parked car can reach 125 degrees in just minutes.

Who are these parents leaving their children in hot cars?

Over at the *Huffington Post* parenting blogger Lisa Belkin [writes](#), "The parents who accidentally leave their children to die could be any of us." Belkin proves her point by pulling from a powerful must-read 2009 *Washington Post* [article](#) by Gene Weingarten:

*What kind of person forgets a baby?*

*The wealthy do, it turns out. And the poor, and the middle class. Parents of all ages and ethnicities do it. Mothers are just as likely to do it as fathers. It happens to the chronically absent-minded and to the fanatically organized, to the college-educated and to the marginally literate. In the last 10 years, it has happened to a dentist. A postal clerk. A social worker. A police officer. An accountant. A soldier. A paralegal. An electrician. A Protestant clergyman. A rabbinical student. A nurse. A construction worker. An assistant principal. It happened to a mental health counselor, a college professor and a pizza chef. It happened to a pediatrician. It happened to a rocket scientist.*

How could these people possibly leave their child to die in a hot car? The answer is simple—forgetfulness. In over half of these deaths it's determined that a loving and protective parent just forgot the child in the car—as Weingarten explains it, "An otherwise loving and attentive parent one day gets busy, or distracted, or upset, or confused by a change in his or her daily routine." It seems likely that a parent could forget their child for two or 10 minutes but several hours? In these cases, the parent often thinks she dropped the child off at daycare or at grandma's house or wherever, and this idea becomes locked in her mind.

Yes, there are horrific parents who intentionally leave children in cars or who are too drugged out to know what's going on, but this article isn't about those people. This article is about the protective, doting, loving parents who in a moment of stress or confusion suffer from a lapse of memory.

These tragedies have become more common in the past decade because children are now by law required to sit in the backseat of the car strapped into car seats. What's more infants are sitting in rear-facing car seats and their faces are hidden from their parents eyesight.

Weingarten goes on to say that these mistakes are inexcusable, but are they a crime? Should these parents be put behind bars? Are they a threat to others? The parents of Kyrese have yet to be charged—should they?

In Weingarten's Pulitzer Prize Award-winning article he interviews 13 parents who forgot their child in a car and if you read their stories you'll find that these parents have been adequately punished by their own grief, guilt and suffering. They're not a threat to others. In fact, some go on to invent devices intended to solve the problem, such as alarms that alert you if you leave your child in his carseat, but these never catch on because most people think they'd never forget their child in the car. But these tragedies do happen and an organization called Kids and Cars offers up some tips for parents on how to make sure it doesn't happen to you:

- Put something you'll need like your cell phone, handbag, employee ID or brief case, etc., on the floor board 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 soon become a habit. We call this 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 anytime the stuffed animal is up front you know the child is in the back seat in a child safety seat.
- Make arrangements with your child's day care center or babysitter that you will always call if your child will not be there on a particular day as scheduled.
- Make sure all child passengers have left the vehicle after it is parked.

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