

# Parked Cars—Dangerous for Kids!

Child  
Safety  
Facts  
2014

## A vehicle is not a playground or a babysitter!

*Every year, many children die in or around parked cars. Leaving a child in a car without an adult, even for a few minutes, is a kind of child neglect. It is illegal in some states.*

### Death in a Hot Car

Tragedy can happen any time a parent or other caregiver leaves a baby or young child alone in the car. On a sunny or warm day, a vehicle can heat up rapidly, and the child can easily get heat stroke. This can happen even when it is under 70 degrees outside and even when a window is down. Brain damage or death can happen in minutes.

Sometimes a busy parent, or one whose routine changes unexpectedly, accidentally leaves a child. Other times the child is left on purpose, such as to continue a nap. Some tragedies happen when a parent doesn't know a child has gotten into the car to play.

### Prevention tips

- Check to make sure that all children are out of the car after you park it.
- Put your briefcase or purse on the floor in the back seat on every trip. This will remind you to look in back before leaving your vehicle.
- Make sure your childcare provider always calls you if your child is not dropped off as planned.
- Check your car and trunk right away if your child is missing.



### Kids Left Alone in Cars

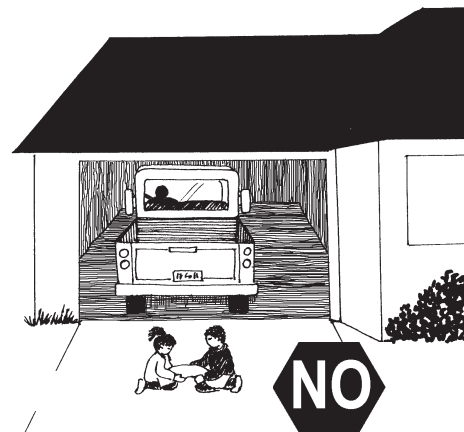
Never leave your child in a vehicle without an adult, even in his or her car seat. Even a brief stop could turn into a tragedy. These things do happen:

- Children (and pets) can get dangerously overheated even if they are left in the car for only a few minutes.
- A child playing with the driver's controls may start the car rolling. Children learn how to make the car go by watching drivers.
- A child can be strangled if the window goes up while he or she is leaning out. This can happen in cars with windows that go up when the control switch is pressed down. Some cars now have safety windows.
- Seat belts can also be dangerous. A child can be strangled by wrapping a shoulder belt around his neck.
- Children can get trapped in car trunks while playing.

### Prevention tips

- Always take your child with you when you leave the car. Do not be tempted to leave your children alone when you go into a store for "just a minute."
- Keep doors of parked cars locked. Put keys out of reach.
- Keep rear fold-down seats locked. This will help prevent kids from getting into the trunk.

*Tell all your child's caregivers about the dangers of parked cars. Make sure they follow the prevention tips given here.*



### Driveway Dangers

Be cautious when moving your vehicle in a driveway or parking area. Toddlers and young children use these areas for play, and are sometimes run over—often by a family member.

All vehicles have blind zones in front and behind where the driver cannot see a child. Blind zones are biggest in high vehicles like pickups, vans, SUVs.

### Prevention tips

- Make it a habit to walk around your car to check for children before getting in.
- Find other places for children to play. Teach them never to play in the driveway or parking area.

### Resources

**KidsandCars.org:** 816-216-7085,  
[www.kidsandcars.org](http://www.kidsandcars.org)

**NHTSA's Keeping Kids Safe: Inside & Out**  
<http://www.safercar.gov/parents/InandAroundtheCar.htm>  
(For Spanish, click "En Español")

**Safe Kids USA:** <http://www.safekids.org/and-around-cars-0>

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# Seat Belts are not Toys!

## Teach Children Not to Play with Seat Belts

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### Can seat belts be dangerous?

Seat belts are lifesavers. They are important for installing car seats as well as for children riding in boosters or big enough to use a seat belt only. However, seat belts can cause injury if children play with them.

In some cases, children have been injured or even killed when they wrapped a shoulder belt around their body or neck. This can cause choking or strangulation. This has happened to kids of all ages. Neither they nor their parents knew the seat belt could be dangerous.

Children do all sorts of unexpected things. A child might play by wrapping himself up in the belt or making the belt into a leash to pretend to be a dog. Without meaning to, he could make the belt tight and be unable to loosen it.



### Know about your car's belts

- Any strap wrapped around the neck can be dangerous, but some lap-shoulder belts are more likely to cause problems than others.
- Learn if your car's lap-shoulder belts are made so that the belt will lock after you've pulled it slowly all the way out (this type of belt is helpful to attach car seats). Once locked, it will only get tighter. To loosen the belt, it must be unbuckled so it can roll in all the way. If it is around a child's body, this may not be possible. See your car



manual to learn about seat belts and car seat installation. Some belts have labels to help (left).

- In newer cars, a car seat may be installed using either a seat belt or a LATCH system (see the car's manual).

If a car seat is installed using LATCH, the seat belt is not used and might be within reach of children.

- A child in a booster seat can easily reach the seat belt. Teach her not to play with the belt. Consider using a car seat with a harness that has a higher upper weight limit (for a list of these, go to [www.saferidenews.com](http://www.saferidenews.com)).

### Steps to reduce the danger

- Never leave a child alone in a car, even for a short time.
- Do not let children play in the car when it is parked.
- Teach your child never to play with seat belts.
- Be aware of what children are doing in the back seat.
- Provide things like soft toys, music, books or a story on tape or CD to keep children busy during car rides.
- Keep a car seat harness snug. A child in a snug harness will be less able to reach an unused seat belt.
- If using LATCH, consider what to do with the unused seat belt. Check the car seat and car manual for ideas. Some may say to buckle the seat belt behind the car seat or loosely through the car seat belt path.
- If a child can reach an unused seat belt that could lock if pulled out, buckle the belt and lock it yourself. This will keep the belt from lengthening if grabbed.
- If your child is caught in the belt, don't panic. Know how your seat belts work. Hold it so it can't retract more. Have a seat belt cutter in your car so you can cut the belt, if necessary (see Resources).



A belt cutter can be used in emergencies

### Resources

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

"Keeping Kids Safe: Inside & Out"; [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov) or [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)

SafetyBeltSafe USA: 800-745-7233, 800-747-7266 (Spanish); [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org) (SBS USA's free parent handout on this subject #646)

KidsAndCars.org: [www.kidsandcars.org](http://www.kidsandcars.org)

Belt Cutter: Search the web under "seat belt cutters" for many product options

Find a local Child Passenger Safety Technician: 866-732-8243 or [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)

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