



Parenting Tips: A Car is Not a Child's Toy

From 1996 through 2000 in the United States, more than 120 children, most of them age 3 or younger, died from heat stroke after being trapped in a car. In the summer of 1999, an average of one child every four days died after being trapped in a car parked in the sweltering heat.

Remove Potential Hazards:

Never leave your child unattended in a car, even if the windows are down and a windshield shade is in place. Make sure all children leave the vehicle when you reach your destination. Don't overlook sleeping infants! Make sure that the seat belt and seat surface are not too hot before buckling up your child. When you and your children exit the car, place a windshield shade in front and back windows to help cut down on the heat. Make sure that kids' arms, legs, fingers and toes are safely inside before closing doors. Always lock your doors and trunk, even at home. Children playing in the car could get trapped. Keep your car keys out of children's reach and sight. Keep the rear fold-down seats closed to prevent kids from getting into the trunk from inside the car. Contact your auto dealership about getting your vehicle retrofitted with a trunk release mechanism. If your child gets locked inside a car, get them out as soon as possible. If you can't get them out, call 911 immediately.

Safety in the heat:

Many parents think they can leave a child in a vehicle if they are just running a quick errand. But excessive heat is much more dangerous for children than it is for adults. A young child's core body temperature can increase three to five times faster than that of an adult, making them much more vulnerable to heat stroke.

Heat stroke can lead to permanent injury or death. Remember that the interior of a car can reach dangerously high temperatures in just a few minutes. When the outside temperature is 93 degrees, the temperature inside your car can get up to 125 degrees in just 20 minutes - even with a window cracked! So even if you're only going to be gone a few minutes, you should never leave your child alone in a car.

Remember, too, that seat belts and seat surfaces can get uncomfortably hot. Be careful when buckling the kids in after returning to the car-hot metal buckles can burn kids' sensitive skin. And it's always a good idea to make sure kids' arms and legs are safely inside before closing car doors.

Safety in your driveway:

Parked cars can be especially hazardous for kids. Always lock your doors. Children are naturally curious and can find ways into cars, but they can't always find their way out. More than a third of last year's heat-related deaths among children occurred when they crawled into unlocked cars and became trapped.

Trunks are for Elephants, not for Children:

Kids may think of the trunk of a car as a fun hiding place, but it is easy to get trapped there. Trunks have very little ventilation and often no handles inside for the child to open the trunk.