

## Look before you lock



Anyone can accidentally leave their child in a car, remember to check your back seat before leaving.

The look before you lock campaign reminds parents and carers that anyone can accidentally leave their child in a car. Tiredness, stress or a change in routine can all interfere with short-term memory, and there are strategies that can help create safer routines that lower the risk of this happening.

### Short-term memory

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Short-term memory is used for temporary information, like reminding ourselves to pick up milk on the way home. When people become tired, stressed, distracted, or there is a break in routine, short term memory can fail and cause habitual memory to take over. Parents or carers manage many competing demands every day, and short-term memory is vulnerable when under pressure.

Our short-term memory can only hold five to nine things at one time, and when this memory is overloaded, new tasks or distractions from routine mean that some items begin to be forgotten regardless of their importance. No one is immune from this type of memory failure.

For example, an exhausted parent may drive straight to work along their normal route rather than stopping to drop a child off at childcare, inadvertently leaving the child in the car when they arrive.

They are performing a routine task that involves little conscious thought - almost like being on 'autopilot' - and do not remember that they have forgotten something.

### **Fatal distraction**

Accidentally leaving a child in a car is sometime known as fatal distraction, and it can happen to anyone. Unfortunately, the consequences have the potential to be devastating.

In recent times, there have been incidents in Australia and around the world where parents or carers, believing a child to be elsewhere and safe, have unknowingly left a child in a car with tragic outcomes.

### **Create a safer routine**

There are some steps that people can work into daily routines to help lower the risk of inadvertently leaving a child in a car:

- open the back door of the car every time you park, even if there is no one in the back seat
- place a child's bag or cuddly toy in the front seat as a reminder
- leave a bag, phone or wallet in the back seat of the car
- use a mirror for rear facing car seats
- create a mental list of things to check each time you leave the car, for example, 'baby, keys, wallet and phone'.

### **More information**

The [\*\*Never leave kids in cars\*\*](#) page has more information about child car safety.

### **Resources**

#### **Accidental leaving: what are the risk factors?**

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### Create a new habit memory – create a safer routine

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### Short-term memory failure and accidental leaving

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## Tips from a new dad: creating a safer routine

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