

Never leave children alone in vehicles

Busy adults can sometimes be tempted to leave children alone in their vehicle – just for a few minutes. However, a tragedy can occur in ‘just a few minutes’ or when ‘just a few minutes’ extends because of unexpected delays – a long check-out line, going back for a forgotten item, meeting a friend from long ago, etc.

What puts young children at risk?

Heat stress

The temperature in parked vehicles rises sharply within minutes – and continues to rise. Even opening windows a little fails to stop the sharp temperature rise. This can cause rapid fluid loss in children and other vulnerable passengers. Serious harm can then occur – heat exhaustion, heat stroke – even death. The sharp build-up of heat can also cause children to be burnt by hot synthetic upholstery and fittings, including seatbelt buckles.

Emotional distress

As well as the likely effects of heat build-up on young children’s health, leaving them alone in a vehicle can make them upset or distressed – making their ordeal even worse.

Other dangers

Young children are **curious and keen to explore** their surroundings. This can lead them into danger if left alone in a vehicle. They can turn on ignition switches, cigarette lighters, power windows and dashboard and steering wheel controls. They can also disengage gear sticks and brake levers. While most new vehicles now have safety devices to prevent the accidental use of controls, these cannot guarantee the safety of young investigators.

Children can also unknowingly **trap themselves** inside a vehicle and not be able to get out. In one year, NRMA rescued 2049 babies (and 903 pets) from locked cars in NSW and the ACT¹.

Sometimes vehicles containing children left alone have been **stolen** without the offender realising that there is a passenger!

We can never be sure we’ll only be away for a few minutes. Always take your children with you or ask another trusted adult to wait with them until you return.

Leaving young children alone in vehicles is dangerous.

It is also an offence and can incur a penalty!²



¹NRMA (2012). *Open Road Member Magazine*, September/October, p74.

²NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 Section 231