

Could a smart car seat save a child's life?

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A baby left in a locked car on a hot day is at risk of death in 10 minutes. Credit: Thinkstock

"I wouldn't buy that. I would never forget my baby was in the car."

This is a common response levelled at Sarina Kilham and her partner, Ednilson Santos, as they undertake early market research for

RememberMe, a baby car-seat safety [device](#) that harnesses smartphone technology to ensure babies can't be left unintentionally in cars.

The idea that you could forget your baby, leaving her in your car with potentially life-threatening results, is so abhorrent that this reaction is understandable. However, it flies against all the research into "forgotten baby syndrome", says Kilham, a PhD researcher at UTS.

"The research says this can happen to anyone, anytime. It is not related to parenting ability, class, money or anything else."

A small change in routine is all it takes for parents functioning on autopilot to forget they have their child with them. In Australia, even on a cool day, this mistake could cost the child's life as temperatures inside the car can be lethal within 20 minutes.

"If it happens on a hot day, the situation can turn fatal in as little as 10 minutes," says paramedic Hamuera Kohu from the NSW Ambulance Service, which is frequently called out to rescue children from locked cars. "The particularly dangerous months are between now and April."

For Kilham and Santos, the campaigns to raise awareness have not been enough to counteract the shocking statistics – as many as 4000 children and [babies](#) are rescued from locked cars in Australia each year. Nor have the media stories that follow a tragedy. But the birth of their second baby, during the summer months, triggered the idea for the safety device.

"I could relate so much to doing things on autopilot, it just seemed crazy to me that something like this didn't already exist," says Kilham. Santos, a student nurse at UTS with a background in IT, quickly ascertained the feasibility of the device and started work on the design.

RememberMe is designed to alert you via your smartphone if you leave the car while your child is still in the seat. It will also have the option of making an emergency call to someone else, giving location details via satellite navigation technology.

As a researcher at the Institute for Sustainable Futures, a chief concern for Kilham is that the device be environmentally friendly. The other essential element is reliability. "Previous inventions in the US haven't been able to cope with something as simple as an orange juice spill," she says. "As parents of two small children, we want to ensure it is 100 per cent reliable."

Despite the vehement reaction of parents who swear they'd never forget their child, Kilham and Santos believe there is definitely a market for their device. This was given a boost in September when their team beat 100 other students to win \$5000 seed funding in Project Pitch, an annual competition to support UTS students to develop the next big idea. They are using the funding to build the prototype. They are also applying for acceleration programs to get the idea off the ground.

A device such as this can't come fast enough for Kohu who says he would welcome anything that prevents the needless anguish and trauma this type of incident can cause.

Saving lives is the objective for Kilham and Santos. "We would be satisfied knowing that our device had saved just one baby's life," says Santos.

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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