

DRIVING DISTRACTED WITH CHILDREN

The primary responsibility of the driver is to operate a motor vehicle safely. The task of driving requires full attention and focus. Drivers should resist engaging in any activity that takes their eyes and attention off the road for more than 2 seconds. In some circumstances even a second or two can make all the difference in a driver being able to avoid a crash. Of special concern is the use of electronic entertainment and communication devices, especially cell phones.

WHAT IS DISTRACTED DRIVING? There are 3 main types of distraction:

1. Visual – taking your eyes off the road
2. Manual – taking your hands off the wheel
3. Cognitive – taking your mind off what you are doing

Distracted driving occurs when the driver engages in any additional activity while operating a motor vehicle. Such activities have the potential to distract the person from the primary task of driving and increase the risk of crashing.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)

THE 4th DISTRACTION – DRIVING WITH CHILDREN

In a first-of-its-kind study, Australian researchers found that when kids are in the car, parents may be calming fussy, crying, or whining babies, braking up fights, distributing food/drinks that may involve spills, or dealing with other issues that warrant attention. According to their findings children are 12 times more distracting to the driver than talking on a cell phone while at the wheel. The parents, according to the study, took their eyes off the road for a staggering 3 minutes and 22 seconds during a 16 minute trip. The most distracting act? Turning to look at children in the back seat, which accounted for 76% of distractions. Compared to that, conversing with a child accounted for 16% and assisting a child with food or drink, 7% of the distractions.

Parents also admit to other child related distractions such as playing the music too loud to calm a crying child, handing them items they dropped on the floor, and feeding them with bottles.

The following are some tips to help keep focused and reduce kid distractions while driving:

1. **SET THE GROUND RULES** – Educate children on car safety. Tell them that parents need to pay attention to the road, so that everyone is safe. If they know you can't and won't react, they will have appropriate expectations.
2. **BE PREPARED** – Before you put kids in the car, make sure you have items that they may need easily on hand or within reach.
3. **MAKE THEM WAIT** – As unpleasant as it can be, tell your kids you cannot help because you are driving and they will need to wait until you can pull over or until you reach your destination.
4. **KEEP YOUR EYES FORWARD** – Resist the urge to reach back or to take your eyes off the road. It only takes a second for an accident to occur.
5. **PULL OVER** – If you need to tend to a child immediately, pull over to a safe spot.
6. **USE YOUR MIRRORS** – Attach a mirror to the head restraint to be able to monitor with a glance. You can monitor without turning around.
7. **DISTRACT YOUR CHILDREN** – Engage them with a song or game. Point out school busses, fire trucks, and traffic lights.
8. **STAY OFF THE PHONE** – Refrain from using a cell phone to talk or text. You are carrying precious cargo and your job is to transport them safely. Not to mention you may be potentially setting a poor example. If you need to make a call, pull over to a safe place or consider using an app like Zoom Safer that blocks calls and text messages by sending an automated response saying you are driving and will answer when you can.

REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT, & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) (<http://www.nhtsa.gov/rsearch/Crash+Avoidance/Distracted>)
- Automobile Club of America (AAA) (<http://exchange.aaa.com/safety/distracted-driving/the-risks-of-distracted-driving/>)
- Consumer Reports: Driving With Kids in the Car (<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2010/01/distracted-driving-driving-with-kids-in-the-car/index.htm>)
- abc News – Reporters Notebook – One of the Worst Driving Distractions on the Road: Your Kids (<http://abcnews.go.com/US/worst-driving-distractions-road-kids/story?id-18684711>)