

Protect your child - use a car seat

BY SUZANNE KEENE

LANCASTER — Most parents are very concerned about protecting their children from harm, yet many neglect to buckle their infants and toddlers into car seats that can save lives in automobile accidents.

The car accident is the leading cause of death and injury to children. In Pennsylvania alone, nearly 9,000 children under age five are involved in auto accidents each year. Many are permanently crippled or disfigured.

However, if children are buckled into car seats and seatbelts, they have a 90 percent less chance of dying in a car accident, according to Dr. Clark McSparren, a Lancaster pediatrician.

"So it's clearly and unequivocally a way of reducing child and infant deaths," he said.

There would be fewer deaths, he said, if parents would take the time to use the seat - not just buy it - and if they would stick to their guns when their two-year-olds protest having to sit still in a seat belt.

"We have to convince them because we care about them," McSparren said.

In Tennessee, where the first infant seat law was passed in 1979, infant deaths in automobiles declined significantly in the first year. Today most states, including Pennsylvania, have a child passenger restraint law.

Effective January 1, 1984 parents or guardians in Pennsylvania are responsible for securing infants under one year in a federally-approved car safety seat and children from one to four in a safety seat or in the rear standard seat belt. Violators will receive warnings until January 1, 1985, when they will be subject to a \$25 fine.

To help new parents select the right seat and use it properly, Cathy Ketterman of Lancaster talks to prenatal classes at the Lancaster YWCA and to classes at St. Joseph's Hospital.

Mother of a two-year-old daughter, Ketterman said she became interested in car seats when she was expecting her child and decided to share her knowledge with others.

Parents should shop at a store with a wide selection of car seats, so they will have the opportunity to compare the different features in each, Ketterman said. They should also consider if the seat will stay in one car all the time or if it will be moved from car to car.

Once parents select the seat that seems to meet their needs, they should ask the sales clerk to allow them to try the seat in their car to check for proper fit.

It's definitely recommended that a car seat be tried in a car before you buy the car seat," Ketterman said.

After buying the seat, parents should carefully read the instructions and then follow them exactly.

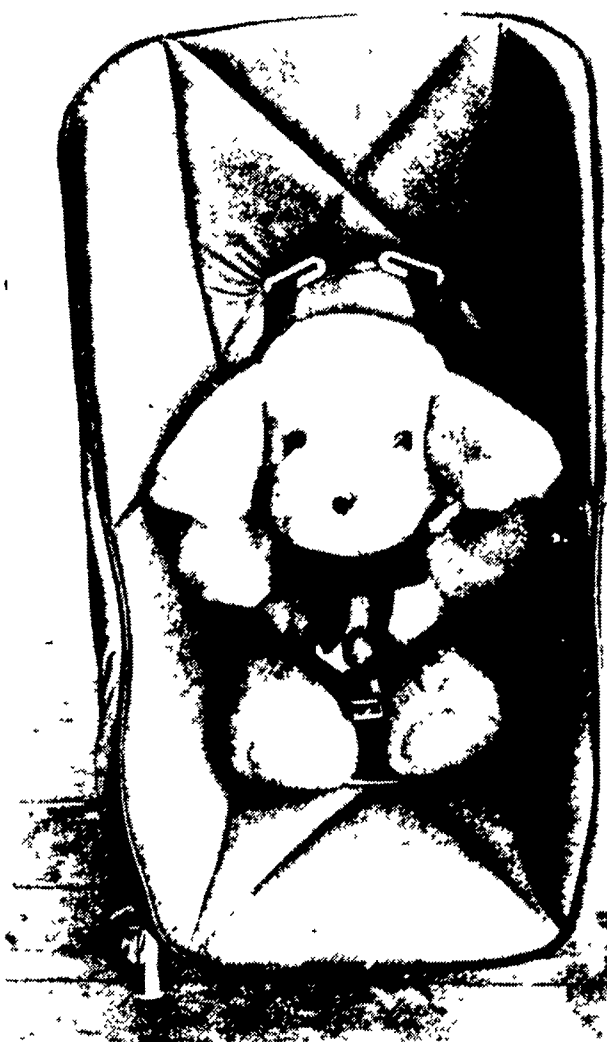
Infants should be placed in their car seats facing backwards, or away from the car's dash as long as possible. When the child is able to hold his head up or when his legs get too long for that position to be comfortable, he should be turned around, Ketterman said.

Baby should be tightly secured in his seat so he doesn't move around in it.

"Make sure the harness is snug with the straps high on the shoulder of the child," Ketterman said. "Otherwise the child can slide around in the car seat."

To insure a tight fit, the child should be dressed in clothing that has definite legs in it so the strap can fit between his legs. Bag sleepers without legs should be avoided.

The middle of the backseat is the safest place for the infant seat.



This stuffed dog is safely strapped into an infant seat that could save his life or the life of his owner in an automobile accident.

Ketterman said, but if a parent is alone in the car, she may want to have the child in the front seat beside her where she can more easily attend to the infant if he should cry or fuss.

If the mother wants to wrap the baby in a blanket while he's in his car seat, she should cut holes in a blanket for the seat's straps, put the blanket in the seat and then strap baby in. After he is secure, the blanket can be wrapped around him, Ketterman said. If the baby is first wrapped in the blanket and then buckled in, he isn't really in the seat, she said.

To make baby more comfortable in his seat, his back and bottom should rest against the seat. If he is slouching, he will not be comfortable, she said.

"In warm weather," she said, "a vinyl car seat gets very hot and so do those buckles and belts."

Parents can cover the seat with a blanket or quilted seat cover and should allow as much ventilation in the car as possible to make baby more comfortable.

To make small newborn babies

more comfortable in car seats that are usually too big for them, Ketterman suggests rolling blankets or towels and tucking them in around baby for support.

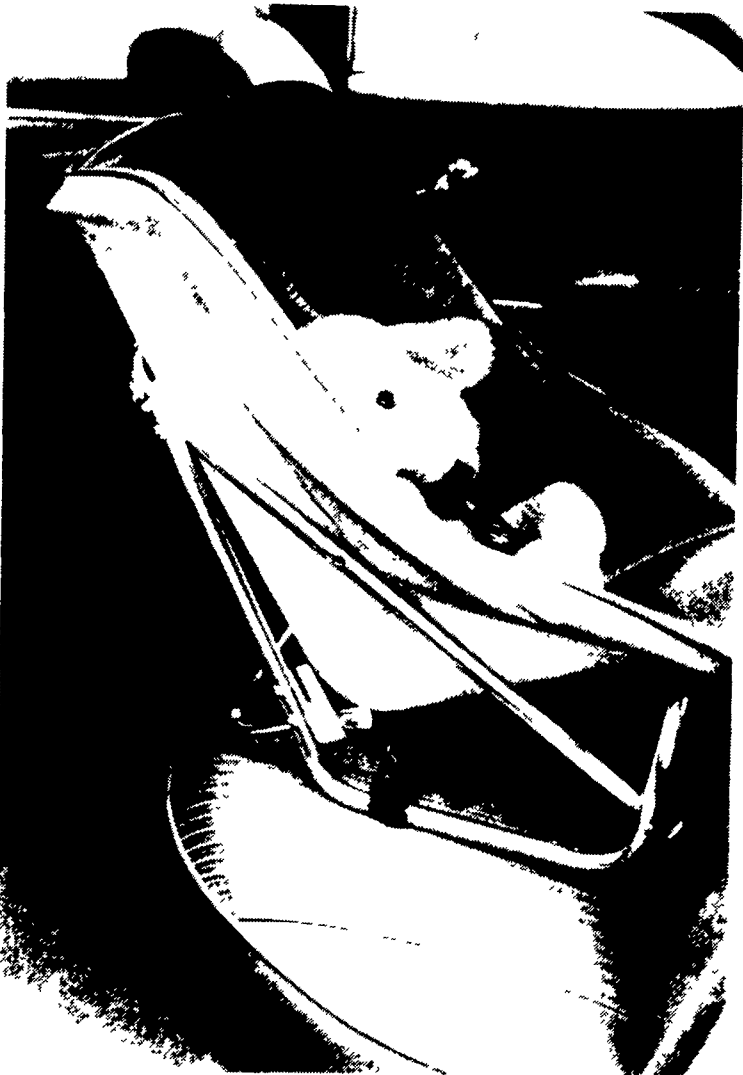
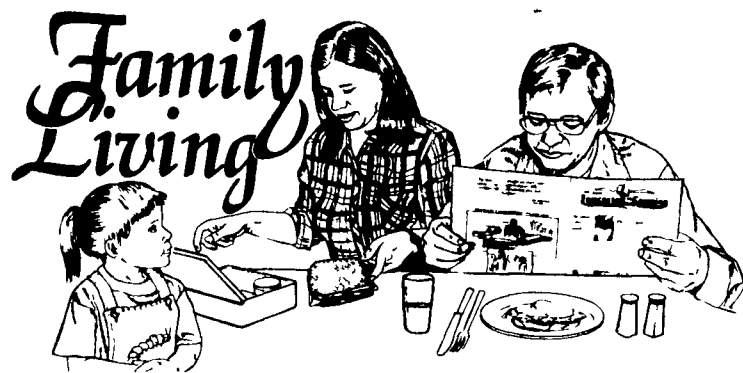
If a child would ever have to ride in a car without a safety seat, he should be buckled into the regular seatbelt, Ketterman said. Children should not ride in feeder seats or fabric snuggly carriers, which offer no protection in a crash, she added.

Many parents, Ketterman said, believe their child is safer in their arms than in an infant seat. But tests have shown that in accidents at 30 mph a child can be thrown forward on his face with a force thirty times his weight.

And if the child is in someone's arms, the individual holding him crushes him into the dash.

"There's no way an adult - even a prepared adult, can hold an infant in a crash," Ketterman said. "Even if you're strapped in, you can't hold that baby."

"You have a whole lifetime of holding your baby other than just those few minutes or hours in a car," she said.



An infant who cannot support his head should be strapped in a safety seat and positioned with his face toward the car seat and away from the dash for greatest safety.

Toddlers need disciplined

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. — As soon as a baby begins to get around under her own steam, parents need to think about teaching her that some things-like electrical outlets-are off limits. This is the beginning of discipline.

In the dictionary, discipline has many meanings. From the point of view of child-rearing, some of these definitions are helpful and others are not so helpful, according to Growing Child, a monthly child development newsletter.

• **Instruction.** The dictionary says this is an old-fashioned meaning. That's a pity because good discipline should instruct a child.

• **Training** which corrects, molds, strengthens, or perfects. This is the best meaning of discipline.

• **Punishment, chastisement.** Many people think of discipline as punishment. They try to decide if certain kinds of punishment are better or worse. But if discipline is something positive that helps a baby learn, grow, and develop, then it is an entirely different matter.

• **Control** gained by enforcing obedience or order. This definition of discipline does not focus on instructing or strengthening or a child's need to learn.

The heart of the matter is this: Can discipline be used in a positive way?

Most children under a year old will continue to do exactly what you don't want them to do. Their curiosity is enormous. Their physical drive propels them from one situation into another. Presented with fascinating new objects and places, they do not have the necessary knowledge —

or experience — to determine what's "yes" and what's "no".

In short, they are just too young to fully understand why some things are acceptable and others are not. By wisely selecting what will be left within a child's reach, adults create a better learning environment for the child and save themselves many moments of anxiety or grief.

For example, assume you have an expensive television set. The knobs are an endless source of fascination for your daughter who takes every opportunity to twist, turn, and pull them. Every time you see her doing this, you tell her "no" and pull her hands away. Her response: the minute you're not looking, she's back at it.

What to do? You can:

1. Persist in "no-no" until she's old enough to get the message. This won't do much good for right now.

2. Slap her hands along with the "no" until she learns what you mean. This may be months away, if your television set still works by then.

3. Use your ingenuity. For example, rearrange the furniture so the set is inaccessible to her, or tape a piece of cardboard over the knobs.

Almost any discipline problem can be solved by adjusting the environment. For instance, you can remove the tempting breakable knickknacks or make the object inaccessible. Sometimes the answer to a problem is not to insist the child adhere to a set of adult rules but to find some means of temporarily changing the situation so a child has room to explore, look, feel, learn, and, at the same time, stay out of trouble or harm's way.