

Forgotten Child in the Car

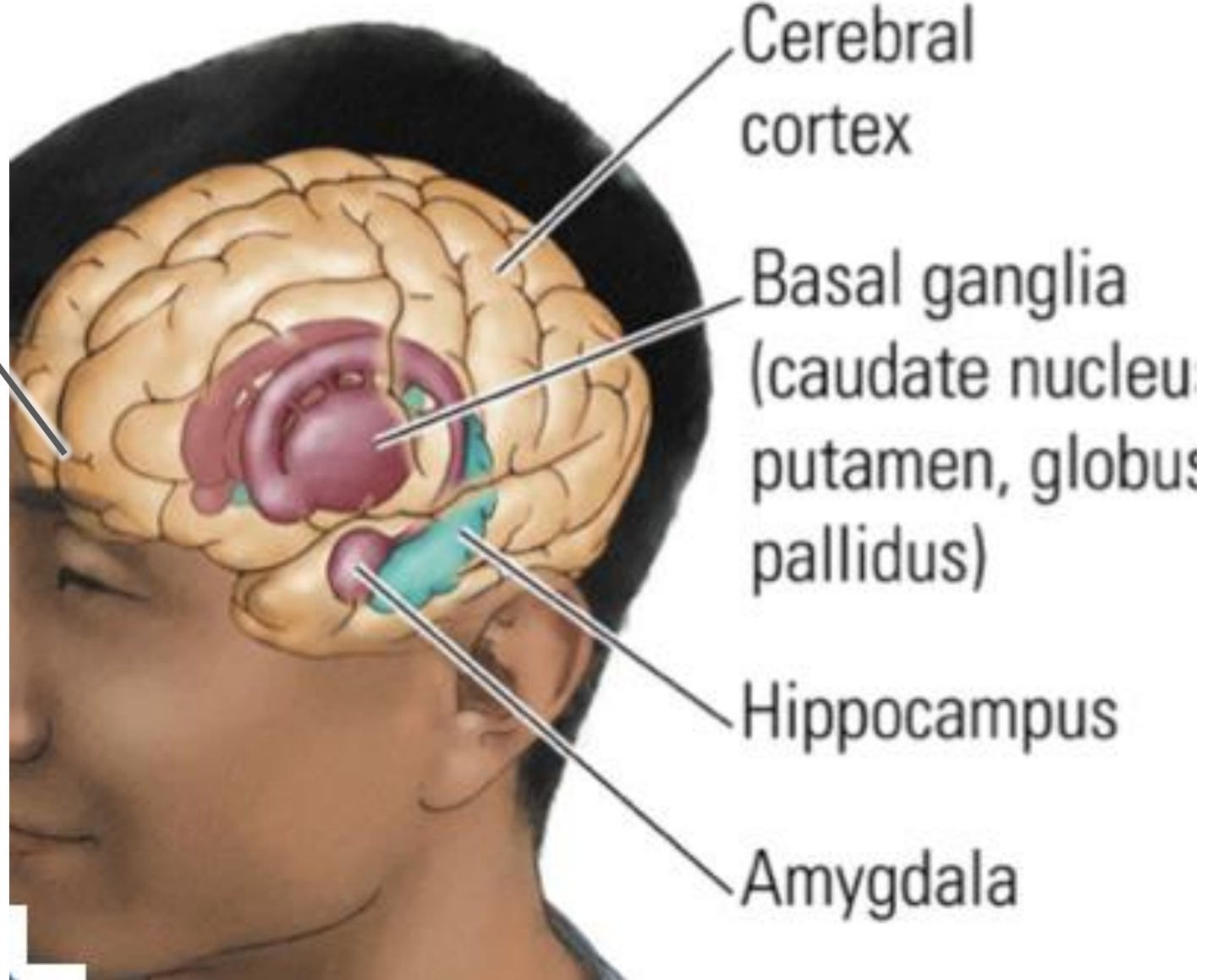
Advice for Parents

May Hwong, Child Passenger Safety Consultant, Childline Malaysia

Forgotten Child Syndrome

- Research done since 2004 by Professor David Diamond, specialising in Cognitive Neuroscience <http://psychology.usf.edu/faculty/diamond/>
- Studied how different brain memory systems appear to cooperate and sometimes compete against each other
- Hippocampus (HC) + Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) controls decision making, multi tasking and memories
- Basal ganglia (BG) controls habit based behaviours
- Amygdala activated in high stress situations, aggravated by lack of sleep
- BG and amygdala can interfere with the HC-PFC memory system and cause memory failures with potentially tragic outcomes.

Prefrontal
cortex



Memory loss or just distracted?

- Have you ever walked from one room to another to retrieve something, and when you got there forgot what it was you were supposed to do or get?
- Have you ever driven home from work and had no recollection of events on route?
- Have you ever lost an umbrella?
- Have you ever left your h/p charging at home?
- Have you ever forgotten where you parked your car?
- (BG and/or amygdala taking over HC-PFC memory system)

Forgotten Child Syndrome

- Can happen in situations out from usual routine
- More likely to happen when parent is emotionally or mentally stressed and totally focused on the problem in hand
- Made worse due to lack of sleep as BG (habit based) memory system takes over and parent goes on auto pilot mode.
- Once the HC-PFC memory system is suppressed, the parent is less able to recollect new information and forgets that child is still in the car.

Tips to Remember Your Child is in the Car

1. Make it a habit to check back seat EVERY time you leave the car.
2. Leave your handbag, brief case, hand phone, shoes etc on the floor at the back of the car, or in seat pocket in front of child restraint.
3. Put child's bag or soft toy on front seat to remind yourself child is present.
4. Have strict protocol with childcare provider to call you if child is not dropped off by a certain time.
5. Set child in car reminder on h/p like in Waze or other apps.
6. Create reminder on your screen saver.

Tips to Remember Your Child is in the Car

7. NEVER leave child alone in car. Car interior temperature can rise by 16°C within 20 minutes.
8. Always lock car after parking at home, to avoid children accidentally locking themselves in.
9. If child is missing, remember to look in cars in the immediate area, especially during social events or family gatherings.

Which is the Best Position to Install CRS?

1. Check vehicle manual for allowed positions to install appropriate child restraint. ie seat belt installation or isofix anchorage points location in the car.
2. Then decide which location suits your needs the best
3. Never install rear-facing crs in front of air bag unless it can be switched off.
4. Bear in mind that there is a more than 30% higher risk of injury for front passengers in a crash as statistics show that most crashes are frontal collisions.

What Should You Do if You See a Child Left Alone in the Car?

1. Check child's condition. If she looks distressed, lethargic, flushed with hot dry skin, breathing rapidly or unconscious, seek immediate help. Do not walk away!
2. Call police/ambulance then try to locate care giver
3. Last resort break in. (But check if any door unlocked first!)

Useful links

- <http://psychology.usf.edu/faculty/diamond/>
- <https://qz.com/1015235/the-neuroscience-that-explains-the-awful-truth-that-anyone-is-capable-of-accidentally-killing-their-child/>
- <https://www.mother.ly/parenting/kind-parent-leaves-baby-car>
- <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/hot-cars-and-kids/hot-car-deaths-scientists-detail-why-parents-forget-their-children-n777076>
- <https://www.kidsandcars.org/how-kids-get-hurt/heat-stroke/>
- <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/hot-cars-kids-study-shows-killer-temps-hit-hour-n876916>