

# Parents urged to properly restrain their children in cars to save their lives

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By Daniel Mwamba

Road traffic injuries remain one of the leading causes of premature deaths in Zambia. The sudden, often violent, death is all more tragic because it’s premature: wiping out abruptly so many years of future happiness – not for them, but also for their families and friends.

Many of those road deaths for children could be prevented if parents took the extra time to make sure their children were in seatbelts and properly restrained.

An observation study undertaken by the Zambia Road Safety Trust (ZRST) in Lusaka revealed an astonishing number of parents who allow their children to travel in cars without restrained in seatbelts or properly restrained, placing their lives and safety at risk.

According to the Zambia police, over 1598 children suffered serious traffic injuries in 2014 – that’s almost three children per day in preventable road accidents.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has established that if correctly installed, child car seats reduce infant deaths by 70% and deaths among small children by 54 to 80 percent.

Children are one of the most vulnerable people in our society, and no parent or guardian would knowingly put a child’s life in danger. Why you would ever risk the life of such a precious gift that has been placed in your care?

Not putting your child in a seatbelt is worse than horrifying and deserves to be classed as child abuse. Don't agree with me? Have you ever seen a car accident where the parents have minor injuries as they were in seatbelts yet their child has gone through the windscreen? This is so easily preventable and yet, many parents are all too apathetic to prevent the loss of a young life.

As we all know, some drivers do not drive the way they are supposed to and take as much care as you take when you're driving. There is always someone who is not paying attention or changes his mind mid lane or "doesn't see" a stop street or traffic light. This careless driver will hit you anytime.

Our hospitals and clinics receive traumas every day of children involved in car accidents, sadly in which they were not in seatbelts, and are unfortunately killed. In other traumas, children survive by the grace of being properly restrained, by a responsible parent. It is really sad to see a child hurt and have injuries that could possibly have been prevented if they were in a car seat or a proper seatbelt.

In an accident at just 50km/h, a child not wearing a seatbelt or using a child car seat would be thrown forward with a force 30 to 60 times their body weight. They would be thrown about inside the vehicle, injuring themselves and, quite possibly, seriously injuring or even killing other people inside the vehicle. They are also likely to be ejected from the car through one of the windows.

It's just so infuriating when the adults in the car aren't doing something that could save their child's life. People think it cannot happen to them. But it can happen to anyone.

It's unthinkable, because these are deaths that shouldn't occur if people would just place their children in the proper car seat and buckle them up with a seat belt.

It is also known to be dangerous to hold a child on your lap. In an accident, the child could be crushed between your body and part of the car's interior. Even if you are using a safety belt, the child would be torn from your arms - you would not be able to hold onto them, no matter how hard you try. It is also dangerous to put a safety belt around yourself and a child (or around two children). The safest way for children to travel in cars is in a child seat that is suitable for their weight and height.

Suitable and safe child seatbelts are approved to the United Nations ECE Regulation 44.03 or 44.04 type approved standards. These give the weight range for the children who may use them. You must use the right one for each child. A properly fitted child restraint system keeps the child in their seat, preventing them from being thrown about inside or being thrown from the vehicle. It also absorbs some of the impact force. This means that your child is much less likely to be killed or injured in a crash.

No one likes to think about death and injury until it's too late. But even though car accidents cannot be foreseen, the injuries that are sustained can be prevented. That's the point. Every child travelling in a car must use a child car seat or wear a seatbelt. A child cannot be responsible for their own safety in the car. The most dangerous thing a child does is travel as a passenger in a car. Therefore, it's up to us as responsible adults to do the right thing to ensure their safety. Parents ensure that children are safely and securely restrained, even on the shortest trip.

**The Author is the chairman of the Zambia Road Safety Trust**

Email: [daniel.mwamba@zambianroadsafety.org](mailto:daniel.mwamba@zambianroadsafety.org)

Tel: +26 0961475610

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