

ECHO Idaho: Autism STAT Patient Case Recommendations

Question:

I've got a nonverbal 9-year-old that is climbing out of the seatbelt strap in the car. The buckle is still connected at the base, but the child is manipulating the actual belt in order to lay down, climb out of the seat, etc. The Guardian is looking for a 5-point harness seat or other way to keep this child safe in the car. Any suggestions?

Recommendations:

Great question, this is an issue that comes up often. Finding someone like a BCBA who can help this family identify the function of the behavior so they can develop some replacement behaviors and a safety plan would be ideal, For those clients I have worked with, our car safety plans usually have several components, the first is a prevention component - this is where those products come into play, There are some links here below for harnesses and car seats.

Seatbelt options:

- I have a family that has used the Roosevelt (obtained through Durable Medical Equipment). Just a warning: the family might need to duct tape around where the cover meets the foam cushion as kids can reach under and pick apart the foam.
- The recommendations are the 5-point harnesses (they have them for larger children, preadolescents, and adolescents) and the adapted car seats for larger kids. There are some products that aren't approved with law enforcement/firemen like the seat belt buckle locks because the child can't undo them in an accident (and some law enforcement don't realize how they work). Some families do choose to use seatbelt buckle locks; they work for a while until the child figures out you just have to stick something in the small hole to open it (they watch parents undo it a couple of times and then they get creative).

Distraction:

- Prevention strategies include finding things the child can do in the car that are safe to keep them busy. These strategies need to be based on their individual interests and can include sensory items (fidgets, stress balls, etc.), word searches, car specific workbooks, and soft items that can't be used as weapons, or toys that are special to car trips (i.e. books, soft marble mazes, figurines). If a child is particularly aggressive, consider a taxicab plexiglass divider. If your client's family has a case manager, work with them to help find funding sources for these products. Sometimes the child's supports budget will cover items (if they chose the Family Directed Pathway, they can get goods),

Consequences:

- Another consideration is to include consequence strategies (i.e. how do parents react to the behaviors?). Depending on the function, stopping and giving lots of attention may be reinforcing the behavior (“ooh we got a reaction from mom, that was fun”). These behaviors may delay going to a place they don't want to go (escape avoidance function) so stopping a lot to re-buckle may equal missed appointments for non-preferred things. They may just want something to do and want to look for some amusement (to get a tangible item).
- Encourage parents/guardians to re-buckling the child without any talking, eye contact, and minimal fuss (planned ignoring with a modification to ignore the child but not the unsafe behavior). This

approach works well for attention seekers but can take a while to work. You can encourage the parents to reinforce (in a big way) those behaviors that you/they want to see (i.e. safe behaviors means getting a treat on the way home, or after XX amount of time) with lots of attention. The child may need a visual for behaviors in the car that you want to see (with pictures depending on their reading level/processing when escalated). A visual way to remind them what they're earning can also help.

- All of these approaches need to be safe and feasible for implementing in the car, so would need to be developed with the family's input to address their concerns.

Resources:

<https://www.buckleupforlife.org/car-seat-101/special-needs/>

<https://www.adaptivemall.com/transportation/safetycarseats1.html>

<https://www.adaptivespecialties.com/car-seats-transportation.aspx>

<https://safeintheseat.com/car-seats-for-special-needs/>

https://www.especialneeds.com/shop/special-needs-seating-positioning/car-seats-seatbelt-guards.html?ne_ppc_id=19784973304&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwI4yyBhAgEiwADSEjeGH7y9fXvFd8givFpql8auGnixBUSHAv64OhDx2hN5Z4a7JJ2YRShoCogIQAvD_BwE