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## A HANDS-ON APPROACH TO CHILD SAFETY

*Monsters have been sighted in car parks across regional Australia, with mothers reporting that they are stopping children from running out in front of cars. ConnectPink's Breanna Tucker reports.*



Jo Byron will never forget the anguish her aunt and uncle went through when they found out their daughter had been hit by a car. Her cousin, just 11 years old, had been crossing the road when a car ran a red light and ploughed straight into her. She broke her arm, both legs and only narrowly avoided missing teeth thanks to the fact she had braces.

“My cousin is now married with children but she still battles with health problems from that accident,” Jo said. “I’d hate for any parent or child to experience the pain that they went through.”

Nobody could have stopped Jo’s cousin from being hit (except the driver who ran the red light) but Jo has been ultra-aware of child road safety ever since. To counter the threat of children running out in front of cars, she has launched a new product called child “safe-t-hands”. The magnetic stickers feature a cut-out of a car with a child-sized hand print in the middle. They are designed to be stuck on the rear passenger doors for young toddlers to touch while their parents load and unload the car.

Some parents have questioned why a sticker or magnet is needed to distract children but Jo said it only took seconds to have an accident.

“I used to work in childcare centres and whenever it came time for parents to pick them up there were kids running right across the car park. They don’t understand that cars can’t see them when they’re little and most drivers are so busy looking for a park they forget to look out for children.

“I’ve asked other parents what they do to keep their children close by the car and some make them hold their hand, or hold onto the trolley or pram. As they get older and more independent, though, they don’t want to hold your hand. This is just one more way to keep them focused.”

Jo came up with the idea of using stickers more than a decade ago after her now 16-year-old daughter, Alexandra, pointed out a petrol cap on her mum’s car. Impressed by how distracted she was, Jo stuck children’s stickers all over Alexandra’s passenger door and asked her describe them every time she was loading and unloading the car.

“The only problem was that when we sold the car, the stickers peeled off all the paintwork,” she said.

The activity was forgotten about until a few years ago when Jo had two more young children and was searching for ways to keep them close by. After trialling removable Wiggles stickers and craft stickers covered in contact, Jo stumbled across a friend who could make car decals and got her son, Josh, to help design four themes: numbers, the alphabet, little girls and monsters in green goo.

She has sold 30 of the car decals since October last year and is just about to launch the same designs as a magnet.

Jo said they were effective, fun and never got boring.

“At first I used to ask the kids to count the upside-down monsters, or how many blue butterflies there were, but they’re seeing new things in their magnets all the time,” she said.

“Josh points to the number 3 and says ‘I’m this many years old now’ or he’ll find a J for Josh. You worry about them getting bored but the reality is they’re not standing there long enough. It’s only the few seconds that you’re opening the door or helping the other child into the car, then they can get in.”

Safe-T-Hand has since been nominated for the people’s choice awards in the ABC Hub People’s Choice Business of the Year award.

You can find more info about Safe-T-Hand at the website <http://www.safethand.com.au>; Jo also writes a blog on ways to make your children more aware of road safety and has been nominated for the ABC Hub People’s Choice Business of the Year award. You can vote from her website.