



# Britney in the hot seat over photos

By Donna Freydkin

What was she thinking?

Britney Spears, whose every move makes the tabloids, drove away from a Malibu Starbucks on Monday with her 4-month-old son, Sean Preston, in her lap and her bodyguard sitting next to her in the passenger seat. This despite the fact that California requires that children ride in car seats secured in the back seat of a vehicle until they are 6 or weigh 60 pounds.

"Unless a deputy saw the violation, there's nothing we can do," Los Angeles County Deputy Luis Castro told the Associated Press.

In response to the photos that appeared online and in numerous publications, Spears released a statement to People magazine, blaming aggressive photographers for the incident and stating that she loves her "child and would do anything to protect him."

Said Spears' statement: "Because of a recent incident when I was trapped in my car without my baby by a throng of paparazzi, I was terrified that this time the physically

aggressive paparazzi would put both me and my baby in danger. I instinctively took measures to get my baby and me out of harm's way, but the paparazzi continued to stalk us, and took photos of us which were sold to the media."

But Sally Lee, editor of *Parents* magazine, says there is no excuse for driving with a baby in your lap, because if there's an accident, the child "becomes a projectile or is crushed between the mother and the steering wheel," she says.

"It's such dangerous behavior, and it goes against everything you've ever been told about auto safety and babies. There are never mitigating circumstances. The baby should be in a car seat, period."

X17, the photo agency responsible for the shots, says the photographers played by the rules.

"These pictures were taken in a very peaceful context, in which photographers exhibited no aggressive behavior. We believe that the pictures speak for themselves," the agency said in a statement.



By Dan Macmedan, USA TODAY

**Fasten your seat belt:** Britney was caught driving with baby on her lap.

USA TODAY is not printing the images because the newspaper does not know firsthand the circumstances surrounding the events depicted.

## DISCUSSION

What law did Britney Spears recently break? Why wasn't she prosecuted for the violation? How did Spears defend her actions? Do you think her explanation was acceptable? In your opinion, what message, if any, did Spears' behavior send to young people?

## APPLICATIONS

- ✓ comprehension
- ✓ decision making
- ✓ problem solving
- ✓ research
- ✓ safety
- ✓ writing

## ACTIVITY

Adopt the role of Britney Spears, and write a letter to a parenting expert. Explain why you chose to drive with your child on your lap, and seek advice on how you should have handled the situation. Then, play the role of the columnist, and answer Spears' letter. Include detailed information about the importance of using child safety seats. For tips on car seat safety, visit one of the following websites:

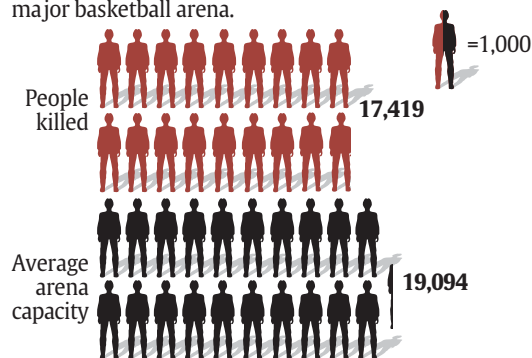
- ▶ [www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm](http://www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm) (the American Academy of Pediatrics)
- ▶ [www.nissanusa.com/m/pdf/carseatsafety.pdf](http://www.nissanusa.com/m/pdf/carseatsafety.pdf)
- ▶ [www.nissanusa.com/content/0,,sctid-51118,00.html](http://www.nissanusa.com/content/0,,sctid-51118,00.html)

STOP

## USA TODAY Snapshots

### The score of drinking and driving

Nearly as many people in the USA were killed in vehicle accidents involving alcohol in 2002<sup>1</sup> as would fill a major basketball arena.



1 - Latest available data

Sources: National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration; USA TODAY research

By Joseph Popiołkowski and Robert W. Ahrens, USA TODAY

**Identify at least three reasons that a person who has been drinking might drive a car — despite knowing that this action could have dangerous consequences. Are people who have been consuming alcohol capable of sound judgment? How should this knowledge inform an adult's decision about when, where and how much to drink?**

**According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Alcohol use is a leading risk factor in the three leading causes of death**

**among youth: unintentional injuries (including motor vehicle crashes and drownings); suicides; and homicides." Why do teens choose to drink, even though it's risky and illegal? Are young people ill-informed about the dangers of alcohol, or do they simply believe that they are personally immune to tragedy?**

**Take a moment to consider all the advantages of *not* drinking in a social situation (e.g., a party). What kind of individuals are perfectly happy just to be themselves, without the crutch of alcohol?**