

# Subtly Saving Lives

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So what if Jennifer Pelky was only 10-years-old? It was a two-person job and nothing could stop her from putting together that entertainment center with her dad.

“I was determined to help him. Basically, I read the instructions and told him what to do,” Pelky says years later while sitting on a cement block in the crash test area at Toyota Technical Center (TTC) in Ann Arbor. “That was my first entry into engineering. I loved doing it.”

Fast forward to 2011. Pelky has graduated from the University of Michigan and is a few years into her job at TTC. She also happens to be pregnant with her first child. She goes to Babies “R” Us to buy a child car seat.

But there are issues. She can’t figure out how to properly install the seat. Eventually, after some struggle and consultation with a coworker, she figures it out.

Think about that for a second.

Pelky – who has a passion for cars, a degree from one of the most prestigious engineering schools in the nation and a job as an engineer for one of the top automakers in the world – had trouble figuring out how to install a normal car seat.

What chance does the average parent have?

According to [Buckle Up for Life](#), Toyota's partnership with the Cincinnati Children's Hospital that helps educate families about child safety seats, only one in four child car seats is properly installed.

That's the issue Pelky is trying to correct. And that situation confirmed for Pelky that interior safety was where she wanted to work.

"When you get your vehicle, there's an anchor the child seat attaches to," she explains. "I'm responsible for making sure that anchor meets federal regulations."

After struggling to install that first seat, Pelky wanted to help other mothers in similar situations. She became a certified child passenger safety technician in 2012. Since then she has worked with Safe Kids Huron Valley to take shifts at local retailers, fire stations and community events to help parents choose the right seat and install it in their vehicles.

In 2014, she joined [Buckle Up for Life](#), acting as a Toyota spokesperson doing media interviews and trying to spread the word on the importance of the issue.

The U.S. Department of Transportation reports that in 2012, 1,168 children under 14 died in traffic accidents. Another 169,000 were injured. But those numbers are likely going down. In 2013, total traffic fatalities hit historic lows, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

And while factors like safety technology play a major role, so does educating parents on how to properly transport their children.

"As a parent I value the safety of my children above everything else and I see a lot of parents who don't know they're doing it wrong, but they're making an effort and that is great," says Pelky. "And I know that when they leave, they're safer than when they came in. That, to me, is huge."