



Car Seat Safety Tips

Everything you need to know to keep your kids safe in cars.

For further information included in the links in this handout, please visit SafeKids.org

Engineers are working hard to ensure that cars and car seats are designed to keep kids as safe as possible. But it's up to every parent to take full advantage of these innovations by making sure car seats and booster seats are used and installed correctly. Here's what you need to know to ensure that your most precious cargo is safe in cars.

Choose the Right Direction: Rear- or Forward-Facing

- For the best protection, keep your baby in a rear-facing car seat for as long as possible – usually until about 2 years old. You can find the exact height and weight limit on the side or back of your car seat. Kids who ride in rear-facing seats have the best protection for the head, neck and spine. It is especially important for rear-facing children to ride in a back seat away from the airbag.
- When your children outgrow a rear-facing seat usually around age 2, move them to a forward-facing car seat. Keep the seat in the back and make sure to attach the top tether after you tighten and lock the seat belt or lower anchors (LATCH). Use the top tether until your car seat labels tell you not to. Check both your child restraint and vehicle manuals to see if there is a weight limit for the top tether. If they both agree to a higher weight, it is fine to follow their directions.
- Kids can remain in some forward-facing car seats until they're 65 pounds or more depending on the car seat limits. Check labels to find the exact measurements for your seat. Discontinue use of lower attachment when your child reaches the limits set by your car seat and car manufacturers. Continue to use the top tether. You must read both manuals to know about those limits. Not



to worry: Once your child meets the lower anchor weight limits, you will switch to a seat belt. Seat belts are made to protect very heavy adults as well as children in car seats and booster seats.

Check Car Seat Labels

- Look at the label on your car seat to make sure it's appropriate for your child's age, weight and height.
- Your car seat has an expiration date. Find and double check the label to make sure it's still safe. Discard a seat that is expired in a dark trash bag so that it cannot be pulled from the trash and reused.

Know Your Car Seat's History

- Buy a used car seat only if you know its full crash history. That means you must buy it from someone you know, not from a thrift store or over the internet. Once a car seat has been in a crash, it needs to be replaced.



Road injuries are the leading cause of preventable deaths and injuries to children in the United States. Correctly used child safety seats can reduce the risk of death by as much as 71 percent.

Make Sure Your Car Seat is Installed Correctly

- **Inch Test.** Once your car seat is installed, give it a good tug at the base where the seat belt goes through it. Can you move it more than an inch side to side or front to back? A properly installed seat will not move more than an inch.
- **Pinch Test.** Make sure the harness is tightly buckled and coming from the correct slots (check your car seat manual). With the chest clip placed at armpit level, pinch the strap at your child's shoulder. If you are unable to pinch any excess webbing, you're good to go.
- For both rear- and forward-facing child safety seats, use either the car's seat belt or the lower anchors and for forward-facing seats, use the top tether to lock the car seat in place. Don't use both the lower anchors and seat belt at the same time. They are equally safe- so pick the one that gives you the best fit.
- If you are having even the slightest trouble, questions or concerns, certified child passenger safety technicians are able to help or even double check your work. Visit a certified technician to make sure your car seat is properly installed. [Find a technician](#) or [car seat checkup event](#) near you.

Check Your Car Seat

- Seventy-three percent of car seats are not used or installed correctly, so before you hit the road, check your car seat. [Here's a quick car seat checklist to help you out.](#) It takes only 15 minutes.
- Learn how to install your car seat for free. Safe Kids hosts car seat inspection events across the country where certified technicians can help make sure your car seat is properly installed. They also serve in fixed locations called inspection stations during specific days and times in some communities. You may find an inspection station with certified technicians at a GM dealership, a hospital or even a fire house. They will teach you so that you can always be sure your car seat is used correctly. [Find a Safe Kids car seat checkup event](#) where we use only certified technicians near you.

Register Your Car Seat

- Register your new or currently used car seat, ensuring that you are promptly notified about future recalls. You can register online with your car seat manufacturer, using the information found

on the sticker on your car seat at safercar.gov. You can also register by filling out the registration card that came with your car seat. It's pre-populated with your car seat's information. Mail the card; no postage required.

Is it Time for a Booster Seat?

- Take the next step to a booster seat when you answer "yes" to any of these questions:
 - Does your child exceed the car seat's height or weight limits?
 - Are your child's shoulders above the car seat's top harness slots?
 - Are the tops of your child's ears above the top of the car seat?
- If the car seat with a harness still fits, and your child is within the weight and height limits, continue to use it until it is outgrown. It provides more protection than a booster seat or seat belt for a small child.



Be Wary of Toys

- Toys can injure your child in a crash, so be extra careful to choose ones that are soft and will not hurt your child. Secure loose objects and toys to protect everyone in the car.

Buckle Up

- We know that when adults wear seat belts, kids wear seat belts. So be a good example and buckle up for every ride. Be sure everyone in the vehicle buckles up, too.
- Buckling up the right way on every ride is the single most important thing a family can do to stay safe in the car.

Prevent Heatstroke

- Never leave your child alone in a car, not even for a minute. While it may be tempting to dash out for a quick errand while your babies are sleeping in their car seats, the temperature inside your car can rise 20 degrees and cause [heatstroke](#) in the time it takes for you to run in and out of the store.
- Leaving a child alone in a car is against the law in many states.

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