

Five Steps for Correct Use & Common Car Seat Misuse

Selection

Select the car seat, booster seat, or seat belt that is right for the child's age, weight, height, and developmental needs. **The right car seat or booster seat fits the child and the car, and will be used correctly every trip - every time.** Not only will the child ride as safely as possible, a child who is secured during every ride will establish a foundation for a lifelong habit of seat belt use every time the child travels.

- ◆ Select a car seat with an adjustable harness height to offer options for rapidly growing children.
- ◆ Some car seats have adjustable positions for crotch straps for a better fit as the child grows.
- ◆ Booster seats keep the lap belt from causing injury to a child's abdomen and keeps the shoulder belt in the proper position to provide upper body protection.
- ◆ Seat belts can be used to safely secure children when the lap belt stays low and snug across the upper thighs and the shoulder belt crosses the center of the chest and shoulder.

Selecting the correct child restraint type is the first step in making sure a child is safe in the vehicle. Be aware of height and weight limits as a child grows. When in doubt, contact a child passenger safety technician in your community.

Car Seat & Booster Seats that Have Been Involved in a Crash

- ◆ **Always follow the car seat manufacturer's instructions for guidelines on when the car seat or booster seat must be replaced.**
- ◆ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends that child safety seats be replaced following a moderate or severe crash. Replacement after a minor crash is not always necessary.
- ◆ Minor crashes meet all of the following criteria:
 - ◆ The vehicle was able to be driven away from the crash site.
 - ◆ The vehicle door nearest the safety seat was undamaged.
 - ◆ There were no injuries to any of the vehicle occupants.
 - ◆ The air bags, if present, did not deploy.
 - ◆ There is no visible damage to the safety seat.

Car Seat and Booster Seat Selection Errors

- ◆ A car seat or booster seat that the child is too small for or has outgrown.
- ◆ A household carrier or other product that does not meet federal car seat design and testing standards.
- ◆ A car seat or booster seat used beyond the car seat manufacturer's expiration date. The expiration date provides guidance on the expected "useful" life span.
- ◆ A second-hand car seat or booster seat that is missing instructions, parts, and/or has an unknown history.
- ◆ A car seat that has been recalled and has not been repaired.
- ◆ A car seat or booster seat that has been involved in a moderate to severe crash.

Misuse: Moving a child out of a booster seat too soon:

Seat belts are designed to fit adults, not children. Injuries to the abdomen or chest can occur from improper seat belt fit during a crash or abrupt stop.

- ◆ Keep children in a booster seat until the seat belt fits properly: the lap belt is positioned low across the hips and upper thighs and the shoulder belt crosses the center of the chest and collarbone. Children must remain in the correct seating position for the entire trip.
- ◆ Booster seats are more than twice as effective in reducing the risk of injury for children when compared to children using the seat belt alone.

Direction

For the best possible protection, **secure children in a rear-facing car seat until 2 years of age or until the maximum weight or height allowed by the manufacturer of the car seat.**

Rear-facing:

Always secure children younger than 1 year of age in a rear-facing car seat.

- ◆ The child should remain in a rear-facing car seat to the highest weight or height allowed by the manufacturer's instructions.
- ◆ If a child outgrows a rear-facing only car seat before age 2, use a rear-facing convertible car seat to the highest weight or height allowed by the manufacturer.

Forward-Facing:

When children outgrow a rear-facing car seat, secure them in a forward-facing car seat with a harness for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by the manufacturer of the car seat.

Rear-facing: the shell of the car seat absorbs the forces of the crash across the entire head, neck and back.

Forward-facing: the harness absorbs the forces of a crash and holds the child in the vehicle.

Misuse: Turning your child forward-facing too soon:

Turning a child forward-facing before age two can result in head, neck or spinal cord injury in a crash due to their undeveloped bodies.

- ◆ Keep children in a rear-facing car seat until they reach age 2 or the maximum weight or height limit recommended by the car seat manufacturer.
- ◆ Rear-facing car seats distribute the forces of a crash across the entire head and body of the child. The shell of the car seat absorbs the crash forces.
- ◆ Rear-facing car seats support the head, neck and back. Traveling rear-facing is 5 times safer than forward-facing.
- ◆ **Children in the second year of life are five times less likely to die or be seriously injured in a crash if secured rear-facing compared to forward-facing.**



Five Steps for Correct Use & Common Car Seat Misuse

Location

All children younger than age 13 should ride in a back seat.

- ◆ Never place a rear-facing car seat in the front vehicle seat if the passenger-side front air bag is turned on.
- ◆ Read and follow car seat manufacturer's instructions and the vehicle owner's manual to determine the effect of side-impact airbags.

Install the Car Seat in the Right Seating Position in the Car

- ◆ There may be many seating positions in a vehicle, not all are suitable to secure a car seat.
- ◆ The car seat manufacturer instructions and/or the vehicle owner's manual may not permit securing a car seat in certain seating positions.
- ◆ Some vehicle manufacturers do not allow a car seat to be secured in the center seating position in a back seat.
- ◆ Select a seating position that allows for correct use of the car seat following the car seat and vehicle manufacturer's instructions.
- ◆ Weight limits on lower anchors and tether anchor locations may affect the seating position choice.

Misuse: Securing a child in the front seat prematurely:

- ◆ Never place a rear-facing car seat in front of an active front seat air bag.
- ◆ If it is necessary to secure a forward-facing car seat in the front seat, be sure to turn the air bag off or move the vehicle seat back as far as possible, away from the air bag.



Installation

Always read and follow the car seat instructions and vehicle owner's manual.

Seat Belt/LATCH

- ◆ Car seat should be secured with the vehicle seat belt or lower anchor connector routed through the correct belt path.
- ◆ Seat belt/lower anchor connector is tight and locked in place allowing no more than 1-inch of side-to-side movement when pulled at the belt path.
- ◆ The installation should be checked for tightness each time the car seat is used.
- ◆ Always use the tether when installing a car seat forward-facing with the seat belt or lower anchors.

Install the Car Seat in the Right Way

- ◆ Read and follow the car seat manufacturer's instructions for the correct rear-facing or forward-facing angle position; reclined, semi-reclined, or upright angle.
- ◆ Secure the rear-facing car seat with the vehicle seat belt or lower anchors.
- ◆ Secure the forward-facing car seat with the seat belt or lower anchors and the tether, following manufacturer's instructions.
- ◆ Secure a booster seat with a lap and shoulder belt.

General Method to Obtain a Tight Installation

- ◆ Place the car seat on the vehicle seat in the correct direction.
- ◆ Thread and tighten the seat belt or lower anchor connectors through the correct belt path.
- ◆ Buckle and lock the seat belt or attach the connectors to the lower anchors in the vehicle. Tighten to ensure the car seat does not move more than one-inch when checked at the belt path.
- ◆ Attach and tighten the tether with the seat belt or lower anchor connectors on a forward-facing car seat.

Misuse: Car seat not installed tightly enough:

Car seats will not stay in place if the seat belt or lower anchor connection is too loose. A loose car seat increases movement in a crash and the likelihood a child will be hurt in a crash.

- ◆ Make sure the car seat does not move from side-to-side or front-to-back more than 1-inch when pulled at the belt path.



Harnessing

Always read and follow the car seat instructions.

Harness

- ◆ Harness straps are snugly secured to hold the child in the car seat during a crash.
- ◆ "A snug strap should not allow any slack. It lies in a relatively straight line without sagging. It does not press on the child's flesh or push the child's body into an un-natural position."
- ◆ Harness retainer clip is positioned at armpit level.

Correct shoulder harness height is critical to being fully secured and reducing the child's movement in the event of a sudden stop or crash.

The less movement that occurs, the less violent forces the child feels in the collision. The harness:

- ◆ Keeps the child in the car seat during a crash.
- ◆ Contacts the strongest parts of the child's body.
- ◆ Spreads the crash forces.
- ◆ Manages the crash forces when correctly positioned.
- ◆ Protects the head, brain and spinal cord.

Always follow the car seat instructions on correct harness position.

Four steps to correctly place a child in a car seat.

1. Child is seated all the way back in a car seat. The child's back and bottom should be in contact with the back and bottom of the car seat.
2. Place the harness straps in the correct harness slots for the child.
 - ◆ Rear-Facing: The harness is placed AT or BELOW the child's shoulders.
 - ◆ Forward-Facing: The harness is placed AT or ABOVE the child's shoulders.
3. Buckle and tighten the harness straps snugly.
4. Place the harness retainer clip at armpit level.

Misuse: Harness not positioned correctly:



Loose harness straps do not properly secure a child in a crash and increases the child's forward movement and possible ejection from the car seat. **Harness straps lay flat, without any twists, and are snug enough that you cannot pinch any extra webbing at the child's shoulder.**

Harness retainer (chest clip) not at armpit level can allow the child to slip out of the harness. The harness retainer clip holds the shoulder straps together in the proper position over the child's shoulders and chest, which keeps the child secure during a crash or sudden stop.

