

# Child Passenger Safety: What You Should Know—Forward-Facing

## American Academy of Pediatrics Best Practice Recommendations for Transporting Children

*(Published in the April 2011 issue of Pediatrics)*

### The American Academy of Pediatrics Guidelines:

- ◆ All children 2 years or older, or those who have outgrown the rear facing weight or height limit for their car safety seat, should use a forward facing car safety seat with a harness for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat's manufacturer.
- ◆ **All children should be secured in the rear seat of the vehicle.**



### Forward-Facing Seat Best Practice

While all children and car seats are different, there are some basic guidelines to help make sure that a child is being transported in the safest possible way.

Keep a child in a forward-facing seat with a harness until:

- ◆ The child reaches the maximum forward-facing weight limit.
- ◆ The top of the child's ears reach the top of the car seat shell.
- ◆ The child's shoulders are above the top harness slot.



## Keeping Children Safe in a Car Seat

**The right car 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 begin a lifelong habit of being secured in the vehicle every time the child travels.

- ◆ Select a car seat with an adjustable harness height to offer options for rapidly growing children.
- ◆ Many car seats are available with harnesses that accommodate children from 65 - 90 pounds.
- ◆ Avoid bulky clothing or padding behind the child.
- ◆ **Car seat manufacturers recommend replacing car seats that have been in a crash.**
  - ◆ Check the car seat instructions for guidance on when a car seat needs to be replaced.
  - ◆ Check with insurance companies regarding their crash replacement policy.
- ◆ Check the car seat label or the instructions for an **expiration date**. Car seats used beyond their life span are not considered safe.
- ◆ If you are unsure of how to use or install your car seat, contact the Pennsylvania Traffic Injury Prevent Project at 1-800-CAR-BELT or [www.pakidstravelsafe.org](http://www.pakidstravelsafe.org) for information on fitting station locations.

## Tips to Achieve Correct Use of a Forward-Facing Car Seat



### Selection

- Read the car seat instructions and/or label to make sure the car seat is appropriate for the child's age, weight and height.
- Be aware of height and weight limits as a child grows.
- Confirm that the child's ears are not above the top of the car seat shell.
- Seat the child in the car seat with their back and bottom in contact with the back of the car seat.



### Correct Direction

- Keep the child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until the maximum forward-facing weight or height is reached.



### Seating Location

- Determine whether the seat belt or lower connectors will be used to secure the car seat.
- Choose a seating location with seat belts that can be locked or approved for LATCH, (Lower Anchors and Tethers for CHildren).
- Secure all children younger than 13 years in the back seat of vehicles for best protection.



### Tight Installation

- Read and follow the car seat manufacturer's instructions to determine the appropriate upright or semi-upright angle when installing the car seat in the forward-facing position.
- Thread and tighten the seat belt or lower connectors through the correct forward-facing belt path.
- Secure the tether with the seat belt or lower anchors, whenever possible.
- Confirm the car seat does NOT move side-to-side or front-to-back more than 1-inch when tested at the belt path.



### Snug Harness

- Place the harness through the correct reinforced harness slots at or above the shoulder following the car seat manufacturer's instructions.
- Secure the child with a snug harness. A snug harness does not permit excess webbing to be pinched at the shoulder or hips once the harness is buckled.
- Place the harness retainer clip at armpit level.

### Harness Slots:

Select and use the reinforced harness slots that are at or above the child's shoulder, following the car seat manufacturer's instructions.

### Harness Retainer Clip:

Positioned at armpit or mid-chest level.

### Snug Harness:

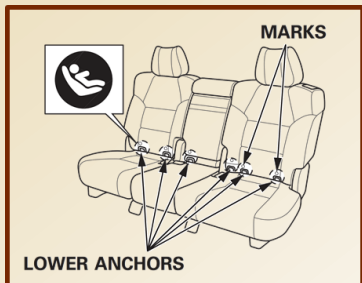
A snug harness does not allow the harness webbing to be folded between your thumb and forefinger when pinched at the shoulder.





## Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children

- ◆ Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children (LATCH) is designed to install car seats in the vehicle using two lower anchors and one tether, in place of the seat belt.
- ◆ Always look in the vehicle owner's manual to locate the lower anchors and tether anchors in the vehicle, and to determine which seating positions have the LATCH system or only a tether anchor.

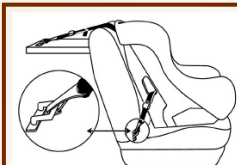


Tether anchor location will vary based on what type of vehicle you drive.

Lower anchors are the metal bars located in the vehicle seat bight.



- ◆ Only seating positions that have a standard LATCH system, as defined by the vehicle owner's manual, should be used for lower anchor installation.
- ◆ Read and follow the LATCH use instructions provided by the car seat manufacturer instructions and vehicle owner's manual.
  - ◆ Do not exceed the maximum weight limit of the lower anchors.
  - ◆ **If the vehicle manufacturer does not state a weight limit, do not use the lower anchors if the child + the car seat combined weight is greater than 65 pounds.**



- ◆ The **tether** is located on the upper part of the back of the car seat.
  - ◆ The tether hook attaches to the tether anchor in the vehicle.
- ◆ The lower anchor connectors are located on the lower part of the car seat.
  - ◆ The **lower anchor connectors** on the car seat attach onto the lower anchors in the vehicle.

- ◆ Thread the lower anchor connector through the correct belt path, attach to the lower anchors and tighten.
- ◆ **Use a tether when installing forward-facing car seats whenever possible.** A tether may be used with the lower anchors or a seat belt. A tether holds the forward-facing car seat against the vehicle seat reducing the distance that the child's head moves forward in a crash by 4 to 6 inches. This reduces the risk of head injuries.
- ◆ A car seat can be installed with LATCH in a non-standard LATCH seating position if both the vehicle and car seat manufacturers allow.
- ◆ Never install a car seat using lower anchors and the seat belt at the same time unless specifically allowed by both the car seat and vehicle manufacturer.
- ◆ **Using Lower Anchor Connectors with Booster Seats:** Some booster seats have lower anchor connectors to secure and properly position the booster seat in the vehicle. The vehicle seat belt secures the child in the booster seat. In this situation, both the lower anchor connectors and vehicle seat belt may be used at the same time and the vehicle lower anchor weight limits do not apply.
- ◆ Unused seat belts may be within reach of a child when a car seat is installed with lower connectors. Reduce the risk of entanglement from unused seat belts by securing unused seat belts as directed by the vehicle manufacturer.



## Forward-Facing: Position the Shoulder Harness At or Above Child's Shoulders

**When a child is forward-facing the harness straps should be coming out of a slot AT or ABOVE shoulder level.**

The correct position of the shoulder harness is **at or above** your child's shoulders. Correct shoulder harness height is critical to optimally securing the child and reducing the child's movement in the event of a sudden stop or impact.

### Harness Positioning For Forward-Facing

**In a frontal collision, a child will move forward with sudden force against the car seat harness.** The correct positioning of the harness, placed at or above the child's shoulders when forward-facing most effectively decreases the distance the child will travel when propelled forward in a crash, (see illustration to the right). **The proper positioning of the harness reduces the amount of forward movement resulting in the child experiencing less violent forces.**



### Selecting the Correct Harness Slot

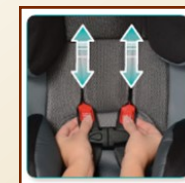
Read the car seat instructions to learn how to adjust the harness height for the child. On many car seats, harness height is adjusted by threading the webbing through slots at different heights on the back of the car seat. Some car seats have a no-rethread harness that adjust the harness height by pulling on levers, pushing buttons, or turning knobs to raise and lower the harness.



Rethread Harness



No-Rethread Harness



Convertible car seats with a rethread harness may require the use of the top slots or allow only certain slots be used for forward-facing. Use only the reinforced harness slots permitted in the instructions to keep the harness secure in a crash. All harness slots are reinforced on combination car seats and forward-facing-only car seats. Use the harness slots that are closest to the child and located at or above the child's shoulders.

### Correct Installation

The harness straps are anchored snugly at or above a forward-facing child's shoulders, and better restrain the child from moving forward.