

# 2018 AAP Guidelines for Car Seat Use

The most dangerous daily activity for United States children is riding in a car. Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of death for children 4 years of age and older. Using the correct car seat or booster seat can help decrease the risk of death or serious injury by over 70%.

## Guidance for Families

In 2018, the American Academy of Pediatrics updated their Child Passenger Safety Policy Statement and recommended keeping children in a rear-facing car seats as long as possible. The summary of evidence-based best practice recommendations for the safest transportation of all children call for the following:

- ◆ All infants and toddlers should ride in a **rear-facing child safety seat** until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car seat's manufacturer.
- ◆ Children who have outgrown the rear-facing weight or height limit for their child safety seat, should use a **forward-facing child 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 whose weight or height is above the forward-facing limit for their child safety seat should use a **belt-positioning booster seat** until the vehicle lap and shoulder seat belt fits properly, typically when they have reached 4 feet 9 inches in height and are between 8 and 12 years of age.
- ◆ When children are old enough and large enough to use the **vehicle seat belt** alone, they should use a lap and shoulder belt.
- ◆ All children younger than 13 should be restrained in the **rear seat** of the vehicle.



## Why the Change?

The 2018 recommendation that all children be secured in a rear-facing car seat as long as possible is a significant change that was based on motor vehicle crash data in the United States. In addition, this recommendation highlights the need to support a child's head, neck and spine and the importance of the crash forces being spread across the entire body. Young children have larger heads compared to the rest of their body size and the bones in their spine are still developing. When a vehicle makes a sudden stop or is involved in a crash, a rear-facing car seat will cradle a child's body and spread out the force of the crash, reducing the risk of injury to the head, neck, and spine.

## SUMMARY OF PENNSYLVANIA'S CHILD PASSENGER OCCUPANT PROTECTION LAW

(Act 53, 1983 / Act 22, 1993 / Act 229, 2002 / Act 81, 2011 / Act 43, 2016)

All drivers operating a passenger car, Class I and Class II truck, classic motor vehicle, antique motor vehicle or motor home shall securely fasten infants and children under 8 years of age in an approved child restraint/booster when the child is riding anywhere in the motor vehicle, including the cargo area. The car seat/booster seat may be in any seating position in the vehicle that is equipped with a seat belt. (However, for maximum protection, a back seat is preferable.)

All drivers transporting children under 4 years of age are responsible to securely restrain those children in an approved child passenger restraint system.

- ◆ A child younger than two years of age shall be secured in a rear-facing child passenger restraint system, to be used until the child outgrows the maximum weight and height limits designated by the car seat manufacturer. (Primary Law)

All drivers transporting children 4 years of age or older but under 8 years of age are responsible to securely restrain those children in a seat belt system and an appropriately fitting child booster seat. (Primary Law)

All drivers transporting children 8 years of age but under 18 years of age are responsible to securely restrain those children in a properly adjusted seat belt system. (Primary Law)



# Harnessing Safety with Car Seats

## Making Sure You Are Using the Harness Correctly

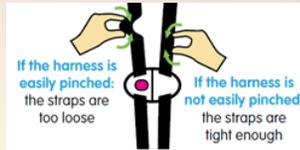
Secure the child properly in the car seat, booster seat, or seat belt. Always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

**Why:** Correct harnessing or seat belt fit ensures the child is securely positioned in the car seat, booster seat, or vehicle seat, and able to take advantage of the crash protection that the harness or belt provides.

- ◆ The harness holds the child in a rear-facing car seat down low in the car seat. The child secured correctly will not slide up and out of the car seat in a crash. Incorrect harnessing, often a loose harness or a retainer clip that is too low, is an extremely common misuse.
- ◆ 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 unnatural position."
- ◆ *Harness retainer clip is positioned at armpit level.*
- ◆ Correct seat belt fit, for children in boosters or in a seat belt transitioning out of boosters is very important and also a common error.

### How Tight Should the Harness Be?

The harness should pass the 'pinch test'; when pinching the harness webbing vertically at the shoulder with the thumb and forefinger, your fingers should slide off easily and you should not be able to pinch any webbing between them. The harness should lie flat, and fit snugly (not uncomfortable) at the child's shoulders and hips.



### Correct Harness Tips

**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.

### 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.**

### Where Do The Harness Straps Go?



#### Rear-facing seats

Straps should originate **AT or BELOW** the child's shoulders



#### Forward-facing seats

Straps should originate **AT or ABOVE** the child's shoulders

## The Danger of Winter Coats in Car Seats

As cooler weather approaches, parents bundle children in bulky coats to keep them warm. Using these thick coats may keep children warm, but they reduce the safety of their car seat. The car seat harness keeps the child in the car seat and spreads the crash forces over a large area of the body. The harness provides the best protection when correctly placed on the child and tightened snugly. A bulky coat can compress in a crash and create slack in the harness.

### Winter Coats and Harnessing

#### What you **CAN** Do

- ◆ Purchase coats that come in layers or offer warmth with thinner fabrics and fillers.
- ◆ Place a blanket over the child's harness in a car seat for additional warmth.
- ◆ Buckle your child securely in the car seat and then put their coat on backwards.
  - ◆ Secure the child in the car seat with the clothes that will be worn while indoors.
  - ◆ Buckle and tighten the harness snugly. A snug harness does not allow any slack; it lies in a relatively straight line without pressing on the child's body and pushing it into an unnatural position. The harness should be snug enough on the child that you cannot pinch any extra webbing.
  - ◆ Slip the child's arms through the sleeves to wear the coat backwards and over the snug harness.
  - ◆ In the event of a crash, the snug harness will keep the child secure.
- ◆ Warm up the car in a well-ventilated area prior to taking the child outside.



#### What you **SHOULD NOT** Do

- ◆ Purchase and use puffy coats, buntings and snowsuits or too much padding under the harness.
- ◆ Use head roll supports that do not come with the car seat (non-regulated). These items can actually interfere with the harness, add padding under the child and affect how the car seat protects in a crash.
- ◆ Use car seat covers that cover the entire car seat for warmth and decoration. Unless the car seat cover comes with the car seat, it should not be used in the car during travel.



1-800-CAR BELT  
[www.pakidstravelsafe.org](http://www.pakidstravelsafe.org)