Child Passenger Safety—Not Just for Infants

Car crashes are a leading cause of death for children and young adults in the United States, but correct use of car seats reduces car crash risk of death by 71% in infants and 54% in toddlers.

**What Are the Types of Car Seats, and How Do I Choose?**

There are many car seats to choose from, and understanding the basics can help you decide. There are rear-facing car seats, forward-facing car seats, and booster seats that use a regular car seat belt. Three criteria can determine what type of car seat your child needs: (1) child height, (2) child weight, and (3) child age and developmental level.

It is best not to transition your child to a different type of car seat until the height or weight limit on their current seat is met. Once infants reach the height or weight limit of their rear-facing seat, they should be transitioned to a forward-facing seat with a 5-point harness and should continue to use that seat until they reach its height or weight limit, whichever is met first. Children can move to a booster seat if they are developmentally able to stay in the seat without taking the seat belt off or playing with it. They should be in the booster seat until they are old enough to fit a seat belt properly, at least until 8 to 11 years old and 4 feet 9 inches tall. The seat belt fits properly if the child’s back touches the vehicle seat back without slouching, the lap belt lays over the hips (not belly), and the shoulder belt lays over the collarbone (not neck).

**How Do I Know If My Car Seat Is Being Used Properly?**

Car seats can be challenging to use, and many caregivers make mistakes when installing and using their car seat. It is important to ensure that the car seat is not expired (check the label) and has not previously been in a car crash. Children younger than 13 years should always ride in the back seat. Always check the installation. Use the Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children (LATCH) system (which can be found in vehicles made after 2002) or seat belt (not both) at the bottom. Make sure the seat belt is threaded through the correct belt path (rear-facing or forward-facing). For a forward-facing car seat, you should also use the top tether, which reduces the forward motion of the car seat in a crash. Caregivers should check the infant/child position. For rear-facing seats, the harness should be snugly fitted and placed at or below the child’s shoulders. For forward-facing seats, the harness should be snugly fitted and placed at or above the child’s shoulders. Both the chest clip and buckle should be connected, and the harness straps should be snug. This can be checked with the pinch test: if you are able to pinch the harness straps together with your fingers, the straps are too loose.

**For More Information**

Your vehicle and car seat manuals
Safe Kids Worldwide car seat guide: [https://uscg.safekids.org/](https://uscg.safekids.org/)
American Academy of Pediatrics: [https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/ont he-go/Pages/Car-Safety-Seats-Information-for-Families.aspx](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/onthego/Pages/Car-Safety-Seats-Information-for-Families.aspx)


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