



Automobile Safety for Children

Safety with Car Seats, Booster Seats, and Seat Belts

Parents and caregivers can:

- Use a seat belt on every trip, no matter how short. This sets a good example.
- Make sure children are properly buckled up in a seat belt, booster seat, or car seat, whichever is appropriate for their age, height and weight.

Know the stages:

- **Birth through Age 2**—Rear-facing child safety seat. For the best possible protection, infants and children should be kept in a rear-facing child safety seat, in the back seat buckled with the seat's harness, until they reach the upper weight or height limits of their particular seat. The weight and height limits on rear-facing child safety seats can accommodate most children through age 2. Check the seat's owner's manual for details.
- **Between Ages 2-4/Until 40 lbs.**—Forward-facing child safety seat. When children outgrow their rear-facing seats (the weight and height limits on rear-facing car seats can accommodate most children through age 2) they should ride in forward-facing child safety seats, in the back seat buckled with the seat's harness, until they reach the upper weight or height limit of their particular seat (usually around age 4 and 40 pounds. Many newer seats have higher weight limits-check the seat's owner's manual for details).
- **Between Ages 4-8 OR Until 4'9" Tall**—Booster seat. Once children outgrow their forward-facing seats (by reaching the upper height and weight limits of their seat), they should ride in belt positioning booster seats. Remember to keep children in the back seat for the best possible protection.
- **After Age 8 AND/OR 4'9" Tall**—Seat belts. Children should use booster seats until adult seat belts fit them properly. Seat belts fit properly when the lap belt lays across the upper thighs (not the stomach) and the shoulder belt fits across the chest (not the neck). When adult seat belts fit children properly they can use the adult seat belts without booster seats. For the best possible protection keep children in the back seat and use lap-and-shoulder belts.

- All children younger than 13 years should ride in the back seat. Airbags can kill young children riding in the front seat. Never place a rear-facing car seat in the front seat or in front of an air bag.
- Place children in the middle of the back seat when possible, because it is the safest spot in the vehicle.
- Before putting your child in a car seat, read the manufacturer's instructions so you know how your car seat works. Pay close attention to guidance on how to adjust your car seat's harness for proper fit.
- The harness secures your child at the strongest parts of his or her body and keeps the child in the vehicle during a crash.

NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) recommends that car seats be replaced following a moderate or severe crash in order to ensure a continued high level of crash protection for child passengers. Car seats do not automatically need to be replaced following a minor crash.

What defines a minor crash? A minor crash is one in which ALL of the following apply:

- The vehicle was able to be driven away from the crash site.
- The vehicle door nearest the car seat was not damaged.
- None of the passengers in the vehicle sustained any injuries in the crash.
- If the vehicle has air bags, the air bags did not deploy during the crash and
- There is no visible damage to the car seat.

Never use a car seat that has been involved in a moderate to severe crash. Always follow manufacturer's instructions.

For more information about this subject please check:

The Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/

The American Association of Pediatrics at www.aap.org

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration www.nhtsa.gov/