

Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Families

Which is the best car safety seat?

No seat is the “best” or “safest.” The best seat is the one that is used correctly every time you drive, fits your child’s size, and is properly installed. Every car safety seat sold in the U.S. must meet very strict safety standards established and maintained by the federal government.

Important safety rules

- ✓ Always use a car safety seat, starting with your baby’s first ride home from the hospital.
- ✓ A child safety seat must be in the back seat, if the vehicle is equipped with a back seat.
- ✓ The back seat is the safest place for all children to ride.
- ✓ Set a good example and always wear your seat belt. It will help your children form a lifelong habit of buckling up.
- ✓ Each car safety seat is different, so read, keep and always follow the manufacturer’s instructions.
- ✓ Consult your vehicle owner’s manual for proper installation of car safety seats.
- ✓ Never leave your child unattended in a car safety seat.
- ✓ Never allow anyone to “share” seat belts.

Rear-facing seats

All infants should ride in rear-facing seats until they weigh at least 20 pounds *and* are at least one year of age. There are two types of rear-facing seats: infant-only and convertible. The convertible seat can be used rear-facing for infants and then converted to a forward-facing position once the child is big enough and old enough to do so safely.

Forward-facing seats

Once your child is at least 20 pounds but less than 40 pounds *and* at least one year old but less than 4 years old, he can ride forward-facing. However, he should ride rear-facing until he reaches the highest weight or height limit allowed by the car safety seat. Forward-facing seats include convertible seats, forward-facing toddler seats, combination forward-facing/booster seats, built-in seats, and travel vests. There are specific requirements for each. Check the manufacturer and/or the owner’s manual.



Booster seats

Booster seats use the lap and shoulder seat belts in your vehicle, the same way an adult rides. It is best to keep your child in a car safety seat with a harness as long as possible before switching to a booster seat. Your child is ready for a booster seat when **one** of the following is true:

- ✓ The child is at least 4 years old but less than 8 years old.

- ✓ The child weighs at least 40 pounds but less than 80 pounds.
- ✓ The child is not 57 inches (4 feet, 9 inches) or taller.

To be considered for a booster seat, the child should reach the top weight and height for his toddler seat, as listed on the seat. Shoulders should be above the top harness slots of the toddler seat and the child’s ears should reach the top of the toddler seat.

Adult Use Seat Belts

How do you know when your child is ready to use lap and shoulder seat belts exclusively? The belts fit properly when your child is between 8 and 12 years old, or is 57 inches in height, or at least 80 pounds and:

- ✓ The shoulder belt doesn’t cut across the neck or throat but lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder.
- ✓ The lap belt fits low and snug across the thighs, not across the belly.
- ✓ The child is tall enough to sit against the car’s seat back with legs bent without slouching and can comfortably stay in this position throughout the trip.

Installing a car safety seat

There are five important points to remember when installing a car safety seat:

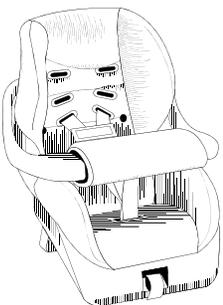
- ✓ Your child must be snugly buckled into the seat.
- ✓ The seat must be snugly buckled into the vehicle.
- ✓ A vehicle operator must follow current safety restraint laws.

- ✓ If your vehicle has a front passenger air bag, infants in rear-facing seats *must ride in the back seat!* Even in a low-speed crash, the airbag could inflate, strike the car seat and cause brain or neck injury/death.
- ✓ Unless *both* your vehicle and the car safety seat have a LATCH anchor system, you will still need to use seat belts to install the car seat.

To make sure all are done correctly, check the instructions that came with the car safety seat, or contact a certified Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Technician for help. A list of certified CPS Technicians is available by ZIP code or state on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Web site at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/contacts or call 888-327-4236. A list of local inspection stations is available at www.seatcheck.org or toll free at 866-732-8243.

Always read and follow manufacturer's instructions

If you don't have the manufacturer's instructions for your car safety seat, call or write the company's customer service department. You will be asked for the model number, name of seat, and manufacture date. The manufacturer's phone number and address are on the label on the seat.



For additional information contact Wisconsin Information Network for Safety at 1-866-511-9467 or the local SAFE KIDS Coalition at 414-390-2178. Also visit the American Academy of Pediatrics website at www.aap.org.

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