

CHILD SAFETY SEATS



Parents-to-be often make the final preparations for their babies' arrival during the months before birth. One very important thing for expectant parents to plan for is car safety. This is an excellent time for parents to plan for their children's car safety by shopping for and purchasing a child safety seat. By planning ahead, parents can be sure that they have this very important piece of equipment in time for their children's first car ride, the ride home from the hospital.

Why Child Safety Seats Are So Important For Newborns

Here are some reasons why safety seats are so very important for newborns:

- * Car crashes are the #1 preventable cause of death for children.
- * Studies show that most children who die in car crashes were not restrained in child safety seats and that they could have been saved if they had been correctly restrained.

* Car crashes are the leading trauma-related cause of spinal cord injury, epilepsy, and mental retardation for children in the U.S.

* It's the law. All 50 states now have laws that require the use of a child safety seat.

* Babies are very fragile. Their bodies and bones are not as strong as an adult's or older child's. Babies are at a much greater risk for injury in a crash. Even sudden stops, minor or low-speed crashes can cause serious injury to an unrestrained child.

* Child safety seats hold children securely in place and help distribute crash forces over a wide area of the body.

* Research shows that parents who secure their children in child safety seats are less distracted while they're driving. Because of fewer distractions, these parents have fewer car crashes.

* Research also shows that children who are consistently placed in car seats are better behaved during car trips than are children who are unrestrained.

Myths About Child Car Safety

Many parents mistakenly believe that holding their infant in their arms while riding in a car will be enough protection in case of an accident. Actually, this is the **most dangerous** place for babies in a car crash. Even in low speed collisions, the infant would be ripped from the parents'

arms with great force. Also, a baby held in the arms of an adult could easily be crushed between the person holding them and the windshield and/or dashboard in a crash if the adult is not wearing a safety belt.

Another common mistake parents make is using pillows, cloth carriers, car beds, plastic feeding seats or cushions instead of child safety seats. These do **not** provide the protection children need in a crash.

Selecting a Car Safety Seat

The first step for parents to take when selecting a child safety seat is to determine which type of seat will best suit their needs. Parents will be more likely to consistently use a car seat that is convenient and easy to use. Parents should check to see if the seat they're considering is easy to install and easy to get their children in and out of. Not all seats fit all cars, so parents must make sure that the seat they select will fit into their cars.

If parents plan to use the safety seat in more than one car, they should make sure it's portable and easy to move. They should make sure, also, that the seat is neither too large nor too small for their children. There are many different brands and styles of child safety seats. It's important to pick the right seat for the child's age and weight. Here are the four steps for safety in the car.

* **STEP 1 Rear-facing until both 12 months and 20 pounds** provides the best protection for infants in a crash. Two types of seats are appropriate for rear-facing

infants in Step 1: infant carriers and convertible seats.

Infant carriers (Figure 1) are designed for infants up to 20-22 pounds (from birth to about one year of age).



Figure 1

They are designed to face the rear of the car only. Some carriers come with travel bases, and some don't.

Convertible seats (Figure 2) can be used from birth to 40 pounds. They are designed to recline and face the rear for infants, and to face forward, in an upright position, for toddlers. Read the directions for each seat. Some convertible seats allow a child to ride in a rear-facing position only to 20 pounds; other seats can be used until 30 or 35 pounds. A 5-point harness provides a better fit than a tray-shield or a t-shield, especially for newborns.



Figure 2



Figure 3

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STEP 2 Forward-facing with a harness until 40 pounds. Babies can ride forward facing when they weigh at least 20 pounds and are 1 year old. But the longer they can ride rear facing, the better they will be

protected in a crash. Two types of seats are appropriate for Step 2: convertible seats and combination seats.

Convertible seats (Figure 3) can be used in a forward facing position until the child weighs 40 pounds. Make sure that the baby's harness straps are in the top slot and that the seat is used in an upright position.

Combination seats (Figure 4) are only used in a forward facing position. The seat is used **with** the harness straps for children between 22-40 pounds, and are used **without** the harness straps for children over 40 pounds.



Figure 4

***STEP 3 Belt positioning booster seats for children who are not yet big enough to fit correctly in an adult seat belt.**

There are two types of belt positioning booster seats: high back boosters and backless boosters.

High back booster seats (Figure 5) can be used for children who weigh 40-80 pounds. These seats **must** be used with a lap and shoulder seat belt. They can be used until the child's ears are above the top of the booster seat. Some high back booster seats can be used for children who weigh as little as 30 pounds, so read the instructions that come with the seat.



Figure 5

Backless booster seats (Figure 6) can be used for children who weigh 40-80 pounds. These seats must be used with a lap and shoulder seat belt. Some backless booster seats have shields, and some don't. Figure 6 shows a backless booster seat without a shield. Figure 7 shows a backless booster seat with a shield.



Figure 6



Figure 7

Like other backless booster seats, **shield booster seats** are for children between 30-80 pounds. **However**, the shield can only be used for children who weigh 30-40 pounds.



Figure 8

Children under 30 pounds or over 40 pounds are not safe riding in a booster seat with a shield. Figure 7 shows a 45 pound child. He cannot safely use this seat with the shield. The child in Figure 8 also weighs 45 pounds. He is correctly using his shield booster with without the shield and with the lap and shoulder seat belt. He is safe!

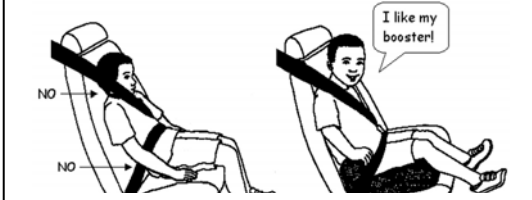
*** STEP 4 Seat Belt** – Seat belts are made for grownups, not children! Use the "Five Step Test" to see if your child is big enough for a seat belt or still needs to ride in a booster seat:

If you answered "no" to even one of these questions, your child needs a booster seat to ride safely in the car. Kids like boosters because they are more comfortable, too!

The 5-Step Test

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the auto seat?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

www.carseat.org
SafetyBeltSafe, USA



Used Car Seats

Parents who thinking about purchasing or using a used child safety seat, must first make sure that the seat has a manufacturer's label attached indicating that it is no more 7-10 years old. This is the only way to ensure that the seat meets strict federal safety standards. Parents must also make sure that all the parts and straps for the seat are included. Ideally, any used seat should have an instruction booklet or an address where parents can send for one. Finally, parents should never use a car seat that has been involved in an car crash.

Where to Put the Child Safety Seat

Generally, the center of the rear seat is the safest place in a car for a child safety seat. This is because most car crashes are frontal collisions. Placing the seat in the middle will provide the most protection from a side collision. Children are safest riding in the back seat until the age of 12, whether or not there is a passenger side air bag in the front seat.

NEVER place a rear-facing infant seat or rear-facing convertible seat in the front seat if you have a passenger side air bag in your car. The National Highway Safety Traffic Administration has warned that a young child could be seriously injured or killed if the air bag deploys. Airbags are designed to protect adults, but are dangerous for children.

Common Mistakes

Shopping for and selecting a child safety seat are two important steps for parents to take to ensure their children's car safety. However, these seats are safe only when they are used correctly. Studies have shown that 80% of all child safety seats are not used correctly. These seats must be installed exactly according to the manufacturer's instructions, and children must be secured in the seat exactly as recommended by the manufacturer to ensure maximum safety.

Here are some common mistakes parents make when using child safety seats:

*Infants (under 1 year old) are placed in the safety seat facing forward instead of towards the rear of the car.

*Required safety harnesses and/or safety shields are not used.

*Harnesses and/or seat belts used to secure children into the safety seat are not tight enough.

*The seat belt used to anchor the safety seat to the auto seat is not used, is in the wrong place, or is not tight enough.

*Promoting a child to a seat belt too soon instead of using a belt positioning booster seat.

Parents can call 1-888-DASH-2-DOT or visit the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration website at

www.nhtsa.dot.gov to find the names of certified child safety technicians who can answer questions and help make sure their child's seat is installed correctly.

A child safety seat is one of the most important purchases parents will make for their children. Selecting the seat that is right for both parents and their children takes planning and preparation. **Remember**, children depend on their parents and the other adults in their lives for protection from harm. Preparing for children's auto safety, beginning with the first ride in the car, is an excellent place to start.



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