



Car Seat Safety Tips

Everything you need to know to keep your kids safe in cars.

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Engineers are working hard to ensure that cars and car seats are designed to keep kids as safe as possible. But it's up to every parent to take full advantage of these innovations by making sure car seats and booster seats are used and installed correctly. Here's what you need to know to ensure that your most precious cargo is safe in cars.

Choose the Right Direction: Rear- or Forward-Facing

- For the best protection, keep your baby in a rear-facing car seat for as long as possible – usually until about 2 years old. You can find the exact height and weight limit on the side or back of your car seat. Kids who ride in rear-facing seats have the maximum protection for the head, neck and spine. It is especially important for rear-facing children to ride in a back seat away from the airbag.
- When your children outgrow a rear-facing seat around age 2, move them to a forward-facing car seat. Keep the seat in the back and make sure to attach the top tether after you tighten and lock the seat belt or lower anchors. Use the top tether until your child weighs 40 pounds. After February 2014, your car seat labels will tell you exactly how much your child can weigh and still use the lower anchors and top tether. Until then, check both your child restraint and vehicle manuals to see if you can go beyond the weight limit for the top tether. If they both agree to a higher weight, it is fine to follow their directions.
- Kids can remain in some forward-facing car seats until they're 65 to 80 pounds depending on the car seat limits. Check the seat label to find the exact measurements. Discontinue use of the lower anchors or top tether when your child reaches the limits set by your car seat and



car manufacturers. You must read the manual to know about those limits. Not to worry: You will then switch to a seat belt that goes through the car seat at that time. Seat belts are made to protect very heavy adults as well as children who have outgrown a booster seat.

Check the Label

- Look at the label on your car seat to make sure it's appropriate for your child's age, weight and height.
- Your car seat has an expiration date – usually around six years. Find and double check the label to make sure it's still safe.

Know Your Car Seat's History

- Buy a used car seat only if you know its full crash history. That means you must buy it from someone you know, not from a thrift store or over the internet. Once a car seat has been in a crash, it needs to be replaced.

Road injuries are the leading cause of preventable deaths and injuries to children in the United States. Correctly used child safety seats can reduce the risk of death by as much as 71 percent



Make Sure Your Car Seat is Installed Correctly

- **Inch Test.** Once your car seat is installed, give it a good tug at the base where the seat belt goes through it. Can you move it more than an inch side to side or front to back? A properly installed seat will not move more than an inch.
- **Pinch Test.** Make sure the harness is tightly buckled and coming from the correct slots (check your car seat manual). With the chest clip placed at armpit level, pinch the strap at your child's shoulder. If you are unable to pinch any excess webbing, you're good to go.
- For both rear- and forward-facing child safety seats, use either the car's seat belt or the lower anchors and for forward-facing, the top tether to lock the car seat in place. Don't use both the lower anchors and seat belt at the same time. They are equally safe- so pick the one that gives you the best fit.
- If you are having even the slightest trouble, questions or concerns, certified child passenger safety technicians are able to help or even double check your work. Visit a certified technician to make sure your car seat is properly installed. [Find a technician](#) or [car seat checkup event](#) near you.

Check Your Car Seat

- Seventy-three percent of car seats are not used or installed correctly, so before you hit the road, check your car seat. [Here's a quick car seat checklist to help you out.](#) It takes only 15 minutes.
- Learn how to install your car seat for free. Safe Kids hosts car seat inspection events across the country where certified technicians can help make sure your car seat is properly installed. They also serve in fixed locations called inspection stations during specific days and times in some communities. You may find an inspection station with certified technicians at a GM dealership, a hospital or even a fire house. They will teach you so that you can always be sure your car seat is used correctly. [Find a Safe Kids car seat checkup event](#) where we use only certified technicians near you.

Is it Time for a Booster Seat?

- Take the next step to a booster seat when you answer "yes" to any of these questions:
 - Does your child exceed the car seat's height or weight limits?
 - Are your child's shoulders above the car seat's top harness slots?
 - Are the tops of your child's ears above the top of the car seat?
- If the car seat with a harness still fits, and your child is within the weight and height limits, continue to use it until it is outgrown. It provides more protection than a booster seat or seat belt for a small child.



Be Wary of Toys

- Toys can injure your child in a crash, so be extra careful to choose ones that are soft and will not hurt your child. A small, loose toy can be dangerous and injure your baby in a crash. Secure loose objects and toys to protect everyone in the car.

Buckle Up

- We know that when adults wear seat belts, kids wear seat belts. So be a good example and buckle up for every ride. Be sure everyone in the vehicle buckles up, too.
- Buckling up the right way on every ride is the single most important thing a family can do to stay safe in the car.

Prevent Heatstroke

- Never leave your child alone in a car, not even for a minute. While it may be tempting to dash out for a quick errand while your babies are sleeping peacefully in their car seats, the temperature inside your car can rise 20 degrees and cause [heatstroke](#) in the time it takes for you to run in and out of the store.

