

# Car Seat Safety: A Guide to Keeping Children Safe on the Road

Children are constantly changing and growing and so should their car seat! Different car seats are designed for different stages of a child's life depending on their weight and height and it is important to have the right kind of car seat that fits those parameters. If by chance a car accident occurs, an improper car seat can cause severe injury and even death which is why it is important to take all safety precautions when it comes to finding the right car seat for your child!

## Types of Different Car Seats:

- **Rear Facing**
  - This is the best seat for a young child to use. It is recommended to use this type of car seat from birth to around age 3, unless the child exceeds the weight/height limit. In case of an accident, this car seat cradles and moves with the child to avoid stress on the child's fragile neck and spinal cord.
  - There are two types of rear-facing seats, an infant car seat and a convertible seat. Infant car seats are typically outgrown before the age of 1. The convertible seat can be both rear-facing and front-facing facing which can make the transition easier as well as more cost-effective. This also allows the child to stay rear-facing much longer.
- **Forward Facing**
  - This type of car seat is typically for children aged 3-7. This is different for every child, though, depending on their weight and height measurements. This type of car seat is recommended for children this age because it has a harness and tether that limit your child's movements during a crash.
- **Booster Seat**
  - A booster seat is recommended for children within the 7-12 age range. Again, this is all dependent on the size and growth of the child. When using a booster seat, the seat raises and positions a child so the vehicle's lap and shoulder belt fits properly over the stronger points of the child's body, the hips and across the chest.
  - There are two types of booster seats, a booster seat with a high back, and a backless booster seat.
  - The booster seat with the high back boosts the child's height to fit the seat belt but also provides support for the neck and head. These seats are ideal for cars with no headrest, or low seat backs.
- **What's next after a car seat?**
  - You guessed it, a seat belt! Once a child outgrows the booster seat around 8-12 years old, they should be able to use the standard seat belt without a car seat. The seat belt should lie across the upper thighs and be snug across the shoulder and chest to properly restrain the child in case of a crash. The seat belt should **NOT** rest on the stomach area, or across the neck or face.



## Did you know?

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, last year, 325 children under the age of 5, were saved by car seats.

Accidents can happen at any time and it is important that your child is as safe as they can be if a crash ever occurs. Each type of car seat is designed to keep your child safe at every age and it is up to you to make changes to their car seats as they grow!



## Safety Tips For a Baby

- Children should ride rear-facing as long as possible or until they reach the maximum height and weight requirement.
- Keep all car seats in the back seat of the car. A child who is riding in the front seat could be injured by the passenger seat airbag.
- The shoulder straps must be at or below the child's shoulders. Child safety seats have several pairs of harness slots so you can adjust the harness as your child grows.
- Never put a blanket between the child and the harness straps, or underneath or behind the child. For car travel, don't dress an infant in bulky outerwear; it can interfere with the tightness of the harness. Instead, place a warm blanket over the child and harness.
- A child has outgrown a rear-facing seat when their head reaches the top of the seat. There should be at least an inch between the top of the child's head and the top of the rear-facing seat.



## How to Shop for Car Seats

### When buying a new car seat, keep these things in mind:

- No one seat is the “best” or “safest.” The best seat is one that fits the child's height and weight accordingly and is used properly.
- Do not decide on a seat by price alone. Just because a certain seat is more expensive than another does not mean that it is safer or more effective.
- Avoid purchasing used car seats. You don't know the history of the car seat, and it may not be in the best condition to keep a child safe.

### Never use a car seat that:

- Is too old. You can determine the age of a car seat by looking at the label and seeing when it was manufactured. Be sure to check with the manufacturer to see how long they recommend using the seat for.
- Has visible cracks on it.
- Does not have a label with the date of manufacture and a model number. Without these, you won't know if the seat has been recalled or if it is a counterfeit car seat.
- Does not come with instructions. You need proper instructions to know how to use the car seat properly.
- Is missing parts. Used car seats can come with missing parts, which can be unsafe and cause the seat to not be used properly. This is why you should avoid purchasing used car seats.
- Was recalled. If a seat is or was recalled, it is not safe for a child. You can find out if it was recalled by calling the manufacturer or contacting the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- Has been involved in a moderate or severe crash. Seats involved in a minor crash may be safe to use. A minor crash is defined by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration as a crash where:
  - The vehicle could be driven away from the scene.
  - The vehicle door closest to the car seat was not damaged.
  - No one in the vehicle was injured.
  - The airbags did not go off.
  - You cannot see any damage to the car seat safety.



Sources: Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Healthychildren.org, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

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