

CAR SEAT SAFETY

When traveling with your child in a car, it is necessary to properly secure your child in a car seat. Proper fit in a car seat can prevent injuries during an accident. There are important guidelines and requirements to consider when selecting a car seat. These include not only the child's age, but also the weight and height of the child. Listed below are some guidelines to follow when securing your child in a vehicle.

What type of car seat should I use for my child?

From birth, infants should **always** be in a rear-facing car seat until they outgrow the car seat as indicated by the car seat's manufacturer. An infant's head, neck, and spine are secured by the back of the car seat. The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends keeping children rear-facing until they are at least 2 years old, but it is safest to keep them rear-facing as long as possible, even after their second birthday. Once the child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, a forward-facing car seat can be used and secured in a vehicle with a harness and tether or LATCH system. One way to see if the baby has outgrown the car seat is if there is less than an inch between the baby's head and the top of the car seat. Make sure the height and weight of your child fit the car seat, as suggested by the manufacturer.

When a child exceeds the weight AND height limits of a forward-facing car seat, he or she may then begin to use a booster seat. The seat belt should be secured over the child's shoulder (not near the neck) and across the body. Children in this age range who are using a booster seat should still sit in the back seat of the vehicle.

Children should remain in a booster seat until they are 4 feet 9 inches tall and between 8 and 12 years old. However, children should sit in the back seat until they have met this height requirement AND are 13 years old.

How do I know if my child is secure in his or her car seat?

When securing your child in a car seat, the harness should be buckled snugly and correctly (as designed by the car seat's manufacturer). The chest clip should be at the level of the child's armpit.

To see if your child is securely fastened, pinch the strap that is placed over the child's shoulder. The child is secure if you are unable to pinch any excess webbing.

When using a LATCH system, make sure to locate the three anchors that will be needed.

Two of the anchors will be hidden in the crease of the seat, while the top (third) anchor may vary depending on the car model. The car's user manual will have information about the specific location of the anchors in the vehicle. Secure the hooks from the base of the car seat first. Adjust and tighten the straps as needed. For forward-facing car seats, hook the top tether strap to the correct anchor, and adjust and tighten to reduce the amount of head movement in case of a collision. To ensure that the seat is securely installed, it should not be able to move more than an inch sideways or forward. When possible, secure the car seat in the middle of the car, farthest from the air bags.

Always make sure to read the instructions in the car seat safety manual or handbook. Check the car's user manual for more information about the LATCH system and where to locate the anchors for securing the car seat.



Quick Facts

- Never purchase a car seat without knowing its crash history. If a car seat has been in a crash or is broken, it is not safe.
- Check the expiration date of the car seat, which can be found on the car seat.
- Bulky outerwear compromises the protection of harness straps in car seats. When it is cold, use a blanket while traveling in the car to keep the child warm.
- To stay up-to-date about car seat recalls, make sure to register the car seat. There are usually two ways to register the car seat—online with the car seat manufacturer (this information can be found on a sticker on the car seat) or by completing and mailing the registration card included when you purchase a new car seat.
- Contact a local certified Child Passenger Safety Technician (CPST), who will be able to make sure your child is properly secured in the car seat. You can find CPSTs at local hospitals and fire and police departments. To search online for a local certified CPST, visit cert.safekids.org and select Find a Tech.

DISCLAIMER: Car seat safety recommendations are frequently updated. To stay aware of these changes, visit <https://www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-booster-seats> or contact your local CPST.

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EXTENSION

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