

# MSU-ES Dawg Tracks



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Safety Tips: Child Passenger Safety



MISSISSIPPI STATE  
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We talk each month on a variety of subjects that have to do with the safety and well being of adults, but seldom do the subjects touch on our most valuable asset, our children and grandchildren. We are never far away from either of these grand subjects.

On December 11, 2008, The U.S. Department of Transportation issued a press release showing that they had recorded record low highway fatalities. SafeKids.org reported that car crashes remain the top cause of deaths of children from ages 3 to 14 in the U.S. SafeKids.org reports that no child should ever die in a car accident if parents, grandparents or childcare providers follow the four basic steps in reducing the risk of injury and death to children who ride in vehicles.

SafeKids.org works with municipalities to provide fit stations and training to ensure that child safety seats are properly installed. Sheriffs' departments and police department usually sponsor these events. These four basic steps are:

- Select the proper child safety seat.
- Install it properly.
- Make sure that the child is seated properly in the seat.
- Change the seat as the child out grows it.

## SELECT THE PROPER SEAT –

- **Selection should first consider the size and weight of the child.** The normal points of reference are:
  - ~Birth from 1 to 20 lbs.
  - ~Age 1+ and more than 20 lbs.
  - ~40, 80, or 100 lbs.Most manufacturers of cars and car seats made since 2002 have lower tethers and anchors for children. These systems are known as latches, which are restraining systems that lock a child in without using the auto's seatbelts. Older vehicles weren't made to have these.
- **Install the Child's Seat properly –**
  - ~Birth from 1 to 20 lb. - Requires the use of a rear-facing car seat correctly mounted in the backseat of a vehicle.
  - ~Age 1+ to more than 20 lbs. - The seat should be forward facing and correctly installed in the backseat of a vehicle.
  - ~Age 40 to 80 or 100 lbs. - The seat of choice is usually a booster seat installed in the backseat on top of the vehicle seat, with the child utilizing the vehicles seat/shoulder belts for security.

## SAFETY BELT FIT TEST –

To use the fit test, use the following steps:

- Have the child sit all the way back on the vehicle seat. Do his/her knees bend to the front edge of the seat? If they bend naturally, go to step 2. If they do not, continue to use the child booster seat.
- Buckle the lap and shoulder belt across the child's lap as he/she sits in the seat. Does the lap belt cross the child's body on the upper legs or hips? If so, go to Step 3. If it lies on the stomach, continue to use the child booster seat.
- Have the child sit in the seat with the seatbelt on. Does the shoulder belt rest on the shoulder or collarbone? If it does, go to Step 4. If it rests on the face or neck, continue to use the booster seat.
- Have the child sit in the seat with the seatbelt on. Does the child maintain the correct seating position for as long as the driver is in the car? If the child slouches or shifts position or if the seatbelt touches the face, neck or stomach, continue to use the booster seat.

Normally when a child reaches the 80 to 100 lb. stage and is about 4' 9" tall, they can pass the fit test and use a booster seat. With a booster seat, there is no harness. It uses the vehicle's shoulder and lap belt.

## SAFETY BELTS –

- Move your children from booster seats to safety belts in the back seat only when they can pass the fit test in every vehicle. Obviously, if the fit test isn't correct, they need to return to the booster seat.
- Ensure that all children sit upright when using safety belts. Never let them lean against windows or car doors or lie down.
- Never put the shoulder belt under the child's arm or behind their back.

It is the responsibility of adults to prevent all children's deaths from automobile accidents. As discussed above, securing our children and grandchildren in their seatbelts correctly is our responsibility and checking as they grow up to maintain a safe and secure sitting for them is imperative.

You know, as drivers of vehicles, we must see that all occupants wear their belts and that we don't fail (sometimes we go "brain dead") to forget to buckle up our own seatbelts.