

✓ Check Your Child's Car Seat!

Choosing and Using Car Seats Correctly

❑ Is your child using the right car seat?

STAGE 1: A child rides facing the rear—the safest way to ride!

Child's first year: Rear-facing-only car seats (A) are small and can be carried. Make sure baby's head is at least an inch below the top of the car seat.

Convertible car seats face the rear for babies weighing up to 30 to 50 pounds (B) (check label), then can be changed to face forward. (C, below).

Child's second year: The child continues facing the rear until she is at the car seat's rear-facing weight limit or her head is less than an inch from the top of the car seat. Most children use a convertible car seat to ride rear facing after about age 1.



STAGE 2: A child rides facing forward with a harness (C, D)

A child rides forward facing after outgrowing a rear-facing car seat. Use a convertible car seat, combination car seat (forward-facing seat/booster), or safety vest.



STAGE 3: A child rides in a booster (E)

School-aged children who have outgrown a harness need a booster until a seat belt fits correctly, usually between ages 10 and 12. *Always* use a lap-shoulder belt with a booster—*never* a lap-only belt.

If the car has only lap-only belts, a booster cannot be used. Learn about safe options from a resource, listed below.



Resources

Nat'l. Vehicle Safety Hotline: 888-327-4236, www.safercar.gov

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.: 800-745-7233, www.carseat.org

Find someone to help: 866-732-8243, or look online:

- www.seatcheck.org (see Inspection under Installation Help)
- <http://cert.safekids.org> (see Find a Tech)

❑ Is the car seat safe to use?

Avoid second-hand car seats. If one is used, check it carefully. Has it been recalled? Does it have all parts and instructions? Be sure it has not been in a crash. Follow a car seat's "do not use after" date—many seats may not be used for more than six years. If you are not sure it's safe, do not use it!

❑ Does your child ride in back?

- **The back seat** is much safer than the front seat. Children under 13 might be big and tall, but their bodies are still different from adults' bodies. They should ride in the back.
- **Air bag safety:** *Never* put a child in a rear-facing car seat in front with an air bag. The force of the air bag can kill a child sitting too close to it. If a truck or car has an air bag on-off switch, turn the air bag off if a child *must* ride in the front seat.

❑ Are you following instructions and laws?

- Always follow instructions for your child's car seat.
- Also, read the car owner's manual on car seats and air bags.
- Know and follow the child passenger laws of your state.

❑ Is the car seat tightly installed?

- Car seats can be installed using either a seat belt or LATCH. Use whichever gives the tightest fit. *Do not* use both at once, unless the car seat *and* car instructions say it is okay. Check car seat labels for weight limits for using LATCH.
- Put the seat belt or LATCH strap through the correct path on the car seat (check labels).
- If using LATCH, connect the car seat hooks to the correct anchor bars in the car. Check the car manual.
- **Important:** Attach the tether if the car seat faces forward.
- Tighten the seat belt or LATCH. A car seat should move less than 1 inch if pushed while holding it near the belt/LATCH.

❑ Are the harness straps the right height? Are they snug on your child?

- Position the straps at the height of your child's shoulders. If there is not a position right at the shoulder height:
 - When rear facing, use the next setting *below* the shoulders.
 - When forward facing, use the next setting *above* the shoulders.
- Make the harness snug, so you cannot pinch any slack.
- Make sure the straps are flat, not twisted.
- Put the chest clip at armpit level.

